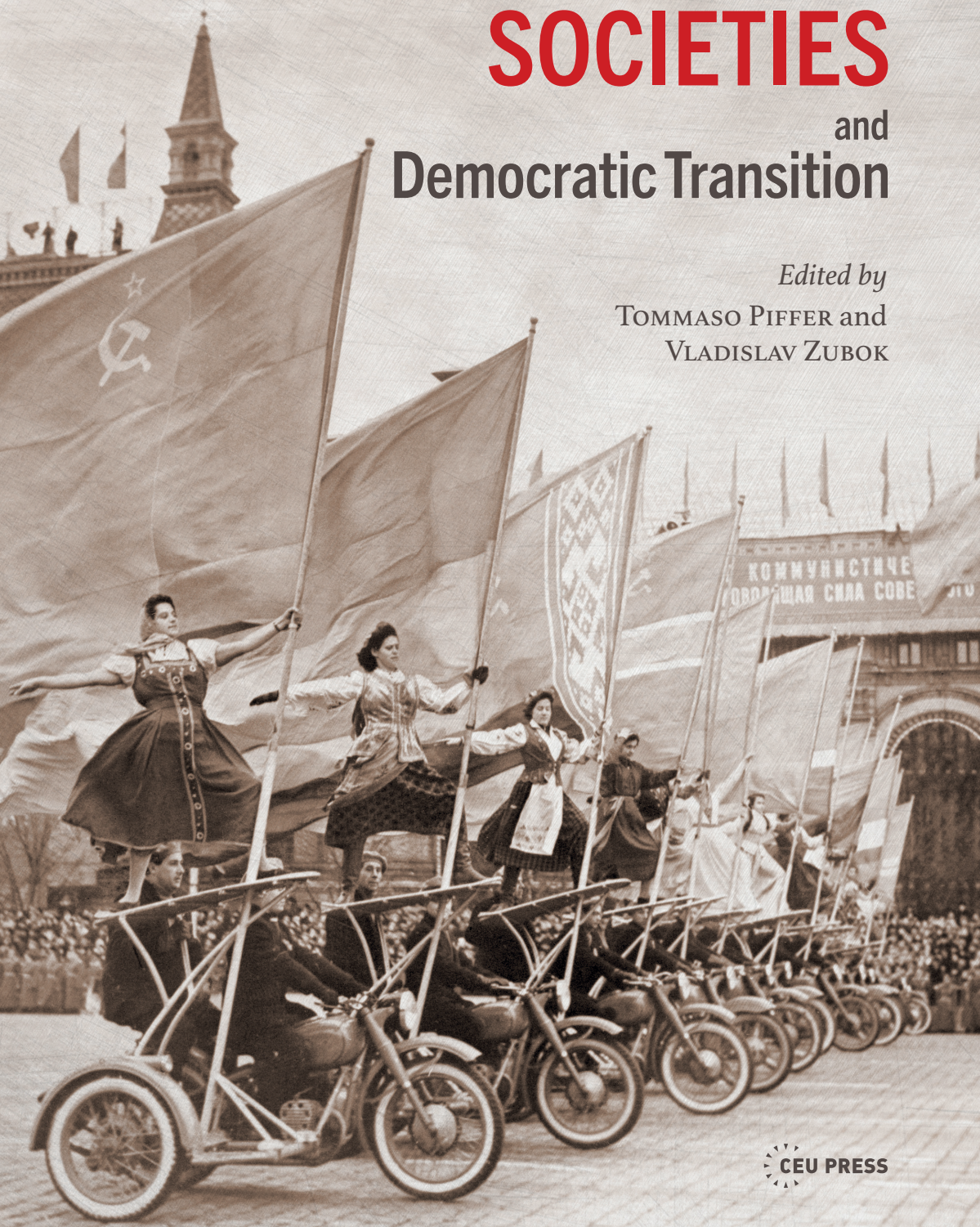


TOTALITARIAN SOCIETIES

and Democratic Transition

Edited by

TOMMASO PIFFER and
VLADISLAV ZUBOK



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**TOTALITARIAN
SOCIETIES**
and
Democratic Transition

TOTALITARIAN SOCIETIES and Democratic Transition

Essays in memory of
Victor Zaslavsky

Edited by
TOMMASO PIFFER AND
VLADISLAV ZUBOK

Translated by
RICCARDO JAMES VARGIU



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Introduction

TOMMASO PIFFER and VLADISLAV ZUBOK

This book is a tribute to the memory of Victor Zaslavsky (1937–2009), sociologist, émigré from the Soviet Union, Canadian citizen, public intellectual, and keen observer of Eastern Europe. The idea for this volume emerged immediately after Victor's sudden and untimely death. The aim was to revisit and reassess what Zaslavsky considered the most important project in the latter part of his life: the analysis of Eastern European, above all Soviet societies and their difficult “transition” after the fall of communism in 1989–91. Most contributors to this volume are scholars who had known Victor, worked with him, learned from him, argued with him, agreed and disagreed with him. The disciplinary variety of the contributions reflects the diversity of specialists in the volume, but also reveals Zaslavsky's gift: he surrounded himself with talented people from many fields and disciplines.

The title requires some discussion, as it may raise questions among readers. Why totalitarian societies? “Totalitarianism” originated from Italian fascism in the 1930s and was widely used in U.S. rhetoric against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The United States used the term “totalitarian” differently from its original fascist meaning, applying it primarily to the state and political regime, not to the society. In March 1947, proclaiming what became known as the Truman Doctrine, U.S. president Harry Truman spoke about “totalitarian regimes imposed on free peoples, by direct or indirect aggression.” In 1951 Hannah Arendt wrote in her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, on the basis of her experience in Weimar and Nazi Germany, about a society where the middle classes are willing to put up with the elimination of liberal ideas and civil liberties out of fear of revolution. Similar ideas, incidentally, circulated

among the intellectuals of the Communist International in the early 1930s, before the advent of Stalinism. But Arendt went further: she offered other causes of “totalitarianism” such as the crisis of European enlightenment, the erosion of traditional hierarchical structures, and the explosive effects of mass politics. In bureaucratized Western society, she argued, people, especially the middle classes—squeezed between the state and the workers—became “atomized” and attracted to führer-like figures and hierarchical parties. Arendt knew relatively little about the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, but was affected by the anti-Semitic campaigns that occurred there under the guise of “anti-Titoism” at the time of her writing. She saw anti-Semitism as a cardinal trait of totalitarianism common to both Nazism in Germany and Stalinism in the Soviet camp.

Simultaneously with Arendt, another émigré from Germany, Harvard political scientist Carl Friedrich, formulated five characteristics of totalitarian regimes: official ideology; one ruling party with iron discipline; the near absolute monopoly of control on all means of violence; the party-state monopoly on the means of mass information and the instruments of coercion; police terror and control. In 1956 Friedrich, with another Harvard professor and Polish émigré Zbigniew Brzezinski, elaborated the concept of totalitarianism. They added the sixth characteristic: the state monopoly control over economic life. They concluded that under totalitarianism the state and society could not be democratized and reformed; in the absence of terror and coercion, both the state and society would collapse.

At the same time, in Western social sciences and humanities—especially sociology, political science, and history—the concept of totalitarian state and society evoked serious reservations and even resistance. In the 1960s, some of the leading experts on the Soviet Union started questioning the adequacy of the term totalitarian for the analysis of Soviet past and present. There were several reasons for this. First, most countries of the Soviet bloc underwent significant social reforms: mass terror ended, the social state began to grow rapidly, providing free education, child care, health, and other services; mass tourism, cultural and scientific exchange resumed between the communist countries and the rest of the world. The rigid conclusions of Friedrich

and Brzezinski, argued observers of the communist societies, denied and obfuscated those changes. It appeared that those reforms would lead to political changes, the replacement of the repressive Stalinist structures, practices, and bureaucracies with the “socialist technocracy.” Second, specific historical and sociological research of Stalinist and post-Stalinist systems revealed too many phenomena that did not fit into the procrustean bed of totalitarianism, at least the way it was conceptualized. There were tough research questions to be answered, among them the actual relationships between the regime (state) and the society in the communist countries; the dynamics and structures of mass terror; the role of ideology and cultural norms. Finally, the question came up: if the totalitarian societies of the Soviet time that emerged after World War II could not be reformed, what would be their future and how it would affect the world?

Unfortunately, instead of sober reappraisal of the very concept of totalitarianism, politicized polemics overwhelmed balanced research. In the 1970s, the new generation of historians and political scientists in the West rebelled against the totalitarian school of their predecessors. As we have already noted, this was to a great extent a rebellion against the false cause: experts on the Soviet bloc had already begun to move beyond the schematic concept of Friedrich and Brzezinski, while acknowledging the value of their empirical research. The ‘revisionist’ historians and political scientists fought against one straw man, but almost built another in their attack on U.S. cold war propaganda. They described the Soviet experiment largely in positive terms, where peasants, workers, and intellectuals participated in the continuous revolution and the construction of a truly socialist society. The revisionists depicted Eastern European countries, above all East Germany and Yugoslavia, similarly. In response, Western liberal intellectuals and politicians, who acted in the public sphere and stood on an anticommunist platform, attacked revisionists and reasserted the tenets of the totalitarian school without adequate research of their own. The concept of totalitarianism became a standard part of the cold war ideology and propaganda. In the late 1970s, Jeane Kirkpatrick and other neoconservatives who advised Ronald Reagan justified America’s alliances with dictatorships around the world. They stressed the

fundamental difference between authoritarian regimes that were capable of transformation and democratic transition, and totalitarian communist societies, such as the Soviet Union, that could not be reformed.

In Western Europe the politicized debates around the term totalitarian have been complicated even more than in the United States because of large communist parties that enjoyed the sympathy of numerous intellectuals. Attempts in the early 1950s by some Western liberals (i.e., the Congress of Cultural Freedom) to present Eastern bloc states and their public diplomacy as “totalitarian” were dismissed by the European left. Even when the new left replaced the orthodox communists, the discussion of the nature of communist societies and their evolution remained victim to the right-left political polarization. Historical memories in Western Europe, and especially the politics of memory in West Germany after the 1960s, also discouraged scholarly approaches to the comparison between the Nazi, fascist, and communist societies—the essence of Arendt’s idea. In the best-known example, in 1986 German conservative historian Ernst Nolte wondered if the Nazi “race murder” of the death camps was a “reaction” to the “class murder” of the Bolshevik Cheka and Stalinist Gulag. This evoked a passionate *Historikerstreit* (1986–89) that in effect precluded scholarly discussion of relationships, similarities, and differences between Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union.

Such was the background against which Victor Zaslavsky and other anticommunist Eastern European intellectuals had grown up. Their interest in “totalitarianism” was nourished by the first Western publications, beginning with Hannah Arendt, and never quite abated. Western writings and polemics about “totalitarianism,” however, evoked ambiguous feelings among those Eastern European intellectuals who lived behind the Iron Curtain and could not share the rosy views of Western left regarding the situation in their societies. Czesław Miłosz was the first Eastern European intellectual who combined his personal experience of living in Stalinized Poland with deeper reflections on the profound distortions of the mental structures of the Polish intelligentsia: dehumanization and abandonment of principles descended from the Age of Reason under constant pressure from the regime and the society. Those intellectuals who emigrated from the Soviet Union and

Eastern Europe in the 1970s struggled to find the audience for their experience and ideas among the Western left. Gradually, the situation improved, thanks to such intellectual journals as *Telos* founded by the energetic Paul Piccone, an American radical of Abruzzian ancestry. Victor Zaslavsky was on the editorial board of this journal for three decades. The journal became a platform for discussions of the European liberal intelligentsia: on the meaning of freedom and illiberal European experience of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the divide between Western and Eastern European intellectuals began to heal after the collapse of communism in Europe and the breakup of the Soviet Union. Polish émigré sociologist, former communist and Marxist, Zygmunt Bauman, was one of many interesting voices in *Telos*, whom Zaslavsky knew and highly respected. In his works, especially in “Modernity and Holocaust” he sought to place the problem of totalitarianism in the broader sociological and historical framework of modernity. His metaphor of the “state as a gardener” became a focus of intellectual debates.

After his emigration from the Soviet Union in 1975, Victor Zaslavsky reflected on the problems of “totalitarian societies” in practically all his major research works and writings. In his first book *Il Consenso organizzato* (1981), translated in 1994 as *The Neo-Stalinist State: Class, Ethnicity, and Consensus in Soviet Society*, he applied meticulous sociological analysis to explain the attitudes of the workers in Soviet society, and the reasons why they did not support technocratic reforms of the 1960s, and remained a passive supporter of the Soviet regime, a part of the “organized consensus.” In his award-winning *Class Cleansing: The Massacre at Katyn*, Zaslavsky made his contribution to the Historikerstreit that had begun twenty years earlier. In this book, he explained the heinous extermination of Polish prisoners of war by Stalin’s NKVD in 1940 by the murderous concepts of Bolshevism that had produced the “class murder” in 1918–21. Even in his interest in the post-Stalin Russian literature, one can see Zaslavsky’s keen realization of the importance of cultural norms in societies shaped by the totalitarian experience of class cleansing.

The fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet collapse came as a surprise to many Western scholars, but not to Zaslavsky

who, with many from his cohort of émigrés, did not believe Mikhail Gorbachev and his emulators in Eastern Europe could do what they promised—that is create “communism with a human face.” He had strong opinions (perhaps too strong for some of his friends and colleagues who disagreed with him) that the societies formed by the totalitarian experience remained structurally, institutionally, socially, and psychologically resistant to market reforms and democratic practices. Zaslavsky criticized one of the editors of this volume for exaggerating the role of Gorbachev’s personality in the story of Soviet collapse. He believed this collapse was socially overdetermined. Such attitude colored Victor’s observations and analysis of the tumultuous Russian political, economic, and social developments during the first two postcommunist decades. He was keenly interested in the lingering impact of old Soviet structures and practices, including the state paternalism, the role of the KGB, and on the failure of “democratic transition” in Russia. The results of his reflections have become a book (with Russian sociologist Lev Gudkov) *La Russia da Gorbaciov a Putin*. Gudkov continues this line of analysis in his contribution to this volume, applying it to the current policies and motivations of Vladimir Putin and social reactions in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

This volume is not only a tribute to the works and thought of Viktor Zaslavsky and the Eastern European intellectuals of his generation, but also an attempt to keep the debate alive and the attention of contemporary intellectuals focused on the social and cultural legacies of totalitarian experience in the space between Prague and Pyongyang. Currently, even those who criticize totalitarianism as a conceptual framework accept the fact that in any case the term describes an important and poorly understood phenomenon in the history—particularly in the European history—of the twentieth century. Recent publications have sought to overcome the ideological-intellectual taboo of comparing Nazi and Stalinist experiences and practices. It is the profound belief of this volume’s editors and contributors that this discussion can benefit from continuous exploration of the ex-communist archives. This research must have a truly international and transnational character, and thus transcend the boundaries of national remembrance established in some postcommunist countries. There should be a balance

between the study of local dynamics and actors, and the policies directed from Moscow. And there should be interdisciplinary methodological approaches, spanning issues of literature and language to traditional issues of high politics and secret services.

As this edition of the book was in preparation, developments inside Russia and Russia's policies towards Ukraine and Syria made the discussions of the legacy of totalitarianism more topical. In Russia the discourse of the memory of the Stalinist period remained muted, but there is a campaign, both in the center and at the grass-roots, to bring back Stalinist symbols by highlighting the victory in the Second World War. In foreign policy, the annexation of Crimea after a controversial referendum mobilized chauvinism and militancy in Russia; the language, memories, and symbols of the Soviet, particularly Stalinist, period suddenly, if selectively, re-entered mass public consciousness and state propaganda. One hears about "consolidation" of the Russian society on the basis of illiberal imperial and national values; about a "farewell to Europe" and its liberal norms; about remilitarization and the need to "tighten up the belts" for the sake of restoring Russia's great power role in the world. These policies and this rhetoric, perfectly in line with Putin's attempt to consolidate his power for the foreseeable future, makes it more difficult, perhaps impossible for Russia to overcome the terrible totalitarian legacy of the twentieth century.

There are similar political and cultural trends in Europe beyond the post-Soviet space, including in the European Union. New forms of worrisome restriction on liberal institutions made their appearance in Hungary and, most recently, in Poland. Scholars do not agree if these trends are really connected to the totalitarian temptation of the previous century, or if they are just reactions to new challenges of the modern world, the traumas of economic globalization and fears for the future. It is beyond the scope of this introduction to discuss such questions. But they show that academic debate on totalitarianism retains the potential to be the source of an innovative analysis not only of the twentieth century's history, but also of some of its current developments.

Another testing ground for studies of totalitarianism and democratic transition is the People's Republic of China (PRC). Under Mao

Zedong, tens of millions of people were killed in successive waves of repression, culminating in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which was directed by Mao at all bureaucratic institutions in the PRC, including the Communist Party. However, the Cultural Revolution itself, which ended with Mao's death in 1976, had the ironic effect of creating a "tabula rasa" that facilitated Deng Xiaoping's efforts starting in the late 1970s to integrate China into the world capitalist economy. If the Cultural Revolution had not severely weakened key bureaucratic institutions, Mao's legacy might have fatally derailed Deng's shift of course. Some Western analysts have claimed that capitalist modernization has enabled the PRC to modernize itself out of its totalitarian past, leaving it fully behind. Time will tell whether this is truly the case.

We hope that this book will reach out to readers with diverse interests and geographic focus. We also hope it will prompt the reader to ask new questions. Far from being complete, research on totalitarianism as a political and human experience will prove all the more fruitful if it is carried out with a multidisciplinary and comparative approach, and if it is extended to other fields of investigation, including the history of liberalism, the history of European intellectual and cultural traditions, and the history of the transition to political democracy, and even beyond these fields.



This volume is divided into three thematic parts. Part I is devoted to the historical and ideological roots of totalitarianism, as well as to the theoretical debate on its nature. Peter Baehr's chapter analyzes Zaslavsky's systematization of the concept of totalitarianism, which it contrasts and compares with the one carried out by the most famous theorist of the subject, Hannah Arendt. Zaslavsky suggested that after the Soviet Union collapsed and the experiment born from the October Revolution exhausted its potential, it became necessary to analyze the system's complete vital cycle in order to understand its fundamental features. By this means, he was able to identify two phases in the evolution of the Soviet regime: the "formative period," extending to the early years of the Khrushchev era and characterized by the systematic use of terror in the name of ideology, and the subsequent "system-maintenance

phase,” in which terror subsided, while the Party’s central role in the state and in the life of citizens remained intact. Arendt was inclined to view only the first phase as strictly totalitarian, whereas Zaslavsky regarded both as totalitarian, albeit in different ways. Nazism was precluded from evolving beyond the formative period by its defeat in the World War, and as a result its history developed along a different route. By following the intellectual path that led Zaslavsky to these reflections, Baehr sheds light on key issues that affect comparative studies on totalitarianism, which are forced to assess systems that evolved under strikingly diverse circumstances.

The two subsequent chapters focus on the period before the rise of fascist and communist systems as such. Giovanni Orsina’s article addresses the subject of the crisis of liberal ideology, dominant in nineteenth-century Europe. The author observes that a possible vantage point from which to analyze the rise of totalitarianism is offered by its reactive nature in the face of liberalism’s crisis. He examines the liberal project (which he describes as progressive, utopian, pedagogical, unitary, and universalistic), its internal contradictions, and the difficulties it faced when it tried to translate its theoretical balance between methodology and substance—or, if you will, between freedom and progress—into concrete historical form. Orsina points out the emergence of two lines of tension in particular. First, the circumstance whereby the progress promised by the system could only manifest itself once a certain level of development was reached. Second, the fact that the promise of progress implicit in the liberal project could only be verified *a posteriori*, and thus had to be initially accepted “based on an act of faith.” In this respect, according to the author, liberalism has something in common with its worst totalitarian enemies, namely, the *a priori* faith in itself and in its political convictions. The chapter goes on to analyze attempts at solving these contradictions in light of Ludwig von Mises’s and Karl Polanyi’s works, and follows the liberal project’s fate after its apparently victorious comeback on the European scene in the post-World War II years.

Vittorio Strada’s chapter investigates two episodes of Russian political culture through which it is possible to see some features of communist totalitarianism that were only identified by theorists in later

decades. The first revolves around the exponents of “legal Marxism,” including Nikolai Berdyaev and Sergei Bulgakov, who were able to detect, before others did, the seeds of political religion in Marx’s work. The second part of the chapter addresses a tendency present within Bolshevism, the one belonging to God-builders, who, with Anatoly Lunacharsky, advocated the need for a new religion linked with the proletariat’s total revolution, and thus drew further attention to the religious nature of the Bolshevik political system. These two episodes show that contemporaries were able to see—in the recently born ideology that would inspire Bolsheviks—the seeds of something new and distinct from previous political experiences, which they identified as having eminently religious connotations.

The next chapter in this section, by Vladimir Tismaneanu, directly poses the question of the comparability between the communist regime and the Nazi regime, explicating a series of similarities and differences having to do, on the one hand, with the relationship between leader and party, and, on the other hand, with the two regimes’ visions of society and progress. The author especially emphasizes both systems’ pretensions to creating a new world modeled on their respective ideologies and that in these pretensions rested the justification for exterminating “objective enemies,” whose mere existence was at odds with the line of history.

Emilio Gentile’s chapter concludes the section by focusing on the case of fascism, addressing the issue of whether it may be classified as a totalitarian regime on a par with Nazism and communism. Gentile challenges some scholars’ proposals to eliminate the category of totalitarianism from historiography and the social sciences on account of its alleged vagueness, as well as the exclusion of Italian fascism from the group of totalitarian regimes. According to the author, this second demand in particular arises from an insufficient knowledge of both the historical origins of fascism and its genetic link with totalitarianism, which he elucidates in the course of the essay.

Part II of the volume deals with history and society in the Soviet, Nazi, and fascist regimes. Vladimir Pechatnov’s chapter portrays some characteristic features of Stalin’s personality and describes his conception of the state. His demand to control each and every

decision, including ones on incredibly minute details, and his relationship with his collaborators, whom he humiliated and kept under constant pressure, are among the elements that show how Stalin did not conceive of himself outside the Soviet state. The archival sources used by Pechatnov are effective in showing Stalin's impatience toward Soviet bureaucracy, which he accused of not being efficient enough, and toward Soviet society, which he deemed disorganized and uneducated. The Soviet leader thus viewed the ideological education of the population as primary among his tasks. For him, state interests took priority and he did not hesitate to sacrifice people and resources in an attempt to transform the USSR into a first world superpower. The chapter therefore explains the important part played by Stalin's "sinister political genius" in constructing the Soviet state as we know it. This is supported by recent biographers of Stalin who suggested that he was as much a product of the totalitarian tendencies worldwide as he was an indefatigable builder of the totalitarian state that could be a perfect instrument of his political will. Indeed, his role was so pervasive that—as immediately noted by the most acute observers of the time—after his death the Soviet state underwent deep change.

Oleg Khlevniuk's chapter is devoted to the political priorities and results of Stalinist dictatorship. The author analyzes the scale of Stalinist terror to show that it was an essential feature of the system. According to the author, more than half of the Soviet population was subjected to some form of repression, ranging from arrests and other security measures to deportation and execution. Defining the true proportions of terror, in the light of the documentation now available, allows a new analysis of the operating mechanisms and of the absolutely central role of terror in Stalinist politics. The most recent research has further shown that Soviet society was much more reluctant to adopt the new state politics than historians previously believed. In particular, it has been possible to prove that large strata of the population, especially the peasantry, strenuously opposed Soviet politics. Precisely this resistance pushed the regime to resort to indiscriminate terrorist campaigns to impose the Stalinist "revolution" on even the most recalcitrant citizens. By analyzing the reasons for and the developments of Stalin's economic policies, Khlevniuk challenges the hypothesis set forth by those who

justify the repressive character of his regime as an inevitable means to modernization. Contrary to these assumptions, the repressive methods of Stalinism mostly had a devastating effect on the Soviet economy.

The next chapter, by Andrea Graziosi, addresses the national question in the Soviet Union, starting with Marxist theory, and with Lenin's and Stalin's variations on it, its various applications, and its development throughout the course of the Soviet Union's existence until its collapse in 1991. Graziosi deliberately avoids using the term totalitarian, but at the same time provides ample material attesting to the Bolshevik state's implementation of innovative and complex policies aimed at ensuring control over a multiethnic territory, over national sentiments, and even over the construction of a common Soviet identity. The author maintains that terror and coercion played a primary role in these politics, particularly in Stalin's day. Clearly, Soviet politics were only partly successful in this regard—like Khlevniuk, Graziosi draws attention to opposition to the multinational state and remembers the contribution of Russians to the dissolution of the Soviet Union under Boris Yeltsin.

Next, Inessa Yazhborovskaia focuses on the memory of the Katyn massacre in Russia by reconstructing the official Soviet version provided by the Stalinist regime and explaining how this version was modified after the fall of the Soviet Union in the context of the altered relations between Russia and Poland. This chapter is an interesting continuation of Zaslavsky's work on Katyn. It casts light on Russia's inability both to divest itself completely of state and party structures set up in Stalin's day, and of reckoning with the skeletons of its totalitarian past, to which it thus became enslaved. In this respect, this chapter should be read in parallel with Lev Gudkov's analysis provided in part III.

David Holloway addresses the issue of the relationship between totalitarianism and science by posing questions that address the impact of totalitarian regimes on science, scientists' attitudes, the use of science as an instrument of legitimation, and the relationship between science and freedom. Holloway's chapter highlights the different attitudes fascist and communist regimes had toward the sciences, and points out the impossibility of building a single paradigm. Particularly in the Soviet Union, the Party intervened directly and demanded to solve scientific disputes, thus causing serious damage to research. Yet this

does not warrant the conclusion that totalitarianism and scientific progress are necessarily incompatible. In other instances, regimes favored and gave firm support to scientific research, making it possible for the latter to achieve great results. Scientists' attitudes were not unambiguous either and could be as complex as the variables that generally come into play to determine an individual's approach to power.

Maria Teresa Giusti deals with the specific case of Danilo Ferretti, an Italian fascist who converted to communism after taking part in the Russian campaign and being taken prisoner. Ferretti's experience is meaningful for two reasons. First, because it shows that what attracted him to communism was the same revolutionary promise and rebellion against the liberal and bourgeois world he had first seen in fascism. Second, because his conversion took place despite the fact that he had witnessed the terrible conditions of Russia firsthand, disregarding the lessons that came from that experience.

Part III of the volume, titled "Beyond Totalitarianism," consists of contributions on both dissidence against the communist regime and its legacy after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The first two chapters focus on the importance of literature. Veljko Vujačić draws attention to the state-people dichotomy in the works of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Vasily Grossman, both of whom viewed it as characteristic of Soviet totalitarianism. According to Vujačić, Solzhenitsyn approached the matter from a neo-Slavophile perspective, whereas Grossman took a Westernized point of view and gave special prominence to the confrontation between the power of the oppressive state and the equally unstoppable force of individual freedom. In the next chapter, Antonella d'Amelia concentrates on the works of Lydia Chukovskaya, particularly on the novella *Sofia Petrovna*, which attests to the social anesthesia that affected the Russian population and to the force of ideology, which made it possible for the overt lies of the regime to be accepted as true. The author's focus is on the difficulties faced by those who decided to recount their personal experience of totalitarian terror, difficulties Chukovskaya tried to overcome by drawing inspiration from the literary tradition of Alexander Herzen, who—especially in *My Past and Thoughts*—was able to produce a "fusion of history and personal life, of political theme and individual drama."

The three chapters that close the volume are devoted to the difficult transition to democracy by former Soviet republics. Lev Gudkov argues for the need to explain Russia's failed transition to democracy by observing the mechanisms by which totalitarian institutions and organs (such as the KGB) reproduced over time, and by analyzing how they managed to remain fundamentally unchanged after the collapse of the communist regime. This approach facilitates the understanding of a number of issues, such as the cause-and-effect relationship between the end of mass terror and the phenomenon of social sclerotization, the suspension of political turnover, and the replacement of missionary ideology by nationalist and religious-conservative ideology. Gudkov, the current director of the most authoritative independent sociological institute in Russia, the Levada-Center, has a superb vantage point to comment on recent developments in Russia that many liberal observers call a "totalitarian relapse." What explains the phenomenon of the majority enthusiastically embracing Putin's policies with regard to Ukraine? It seems that the new techniques of shaping collective memories can indeed transform totalitarian experience into something "positive": above all this was demonstrated by the cult of victory in 1945, the pride of the role the Soviet Union played in the world as a victorious great power. State propaganda combines this theme with contempt for the democratic liberal European project, which reminds some observers of the early fascist criticism of liberalism in Italy. Gudkov defines the Putin regime "as a system of decentralized yet institutionalized use of violence by the power state structures that survived from the totalitarian regime." It is worth noting that in September 2016 the Russian Justice Ministry, in accordance with a law designed to target institutions that receive funds from abroad, declared the Levada Center a "foreign agent," putting the Center's future as an independent organization into doubt.

Gail Lapidus's chapter focuses on a particular aspect of the transition—namely, the national question—and investigates the ways in which the legacy of Soviet institutions influenced post-1991 developments, and how the new state attempted to manage them in the new historical situation. This contribution may be read alongside Graziosi's, in a sense that it also underlines the role played by Russian and non-Russian

nationalisms in overthrowing the delegitimized Soviet state. Lapidus believes one of the main problems faced by post-communist Russia in its attempt to transition to democracy has had to do with the inability to create a clear concept of national identity. The minefields of ethnic conflicts and the ethnic hierarchy of republics and regions created during the Soviet regime continued to plague Yeltsin's plans for a reformist government. Indeed, Yeltsin tried to co-opt several ethnic groups, but his strategy proved ineffective in the case of the Chechen people. Chechen separatism catapulted Putin into power, owing to his authoritarian approach to regional ethnic separatisms. Russian authorities appealed to Russian nationalism, as Soviet leaders had done in the past, all the while fearing they might lose control over it.

Finally, Mark Kramer's contribution concentrates on the difficulty faced by present-day Russia and Poland in coming to terms with the past. By briefly addressing the cases of Germany, France, Austria, Japan, and the United States, the author points out that even well-established democracies have a hard time reckoning with the dark pages of their past. In the two countries under investigation in this chapter, the task is made particularly difficult by the relative proximity to the events being dealt with, and by the political situation. In Poland, the debate is poisoned by charges of complicity with the regime imposed by Moscow leveled against important exponents of the new democratic regime, as well as by questions raised on General Wojciech Jaruzelski's role (was he a hero, or a traitor?). The process of historical reckoning has also been marked by controversy and recrimination about the question of Poles' complicity in the annihilation of Polish Jews during the Second World War. In Russia, Putin's regime has made an unconscionable use of the memory of the Stalinist period, minimizing its crimes, and seeking to bring back its symbols and institutions. This operation, perfectly in line with Putin's attempt to provide the country with a historical foundation for the legitimization of its role as a great power, to this day makes it impossible for Russia to overcome that terrible legacy, and makes the prospects of its embarking on a road to democracy increasingly bleak.

Part I

THEORY
and
DEBATE

Movement, Formation, and Maintenance in the Soviet Union

Victor Zaslavsky's Challenge
to the Arendtian Theory of Totalitarianism

PETER BAEHR

Totalitarianism is a term that Victor Zaslavsky (1937–2009) embraced only in the later part of his career.¹ In the revised essays from the late 1970s and early 1980s, that comprise *The Neo-Stalinist State* (1982), totalitarianism appears only sparingly and, even then, is heavily qualified.² Like many writers of the time, Zaslavsky seems to have concluded that the term was both formulaic and misleading, particularly when applied to the USSR after Stalin's death. Worse, it actually impeded a nuanced understanding of Soviet conditions. Consider, for instance, the problem of legitimacy in Soviet society. Because traditional notions of totalitarianism assume a prostrate, terrorized populace, the very notion of legitimacy—more or less consensual mass support—appears contrived or downright nonsensical; hence, a potentially fertile avenue of investigation is closed off by conceptual fiat.³ Such was the nature

¹ This chapter is dedicated to Elena Aga-Rossi. The research on which it is based was generously supported by a Fellowship in the Humanities and Social Sciences funded by the Hong Kong Research Grants Committee. Fund Code: PF14A1. It forms part of a broader project on “unmasking” in which the Soviet experience, particularly between 1917 and 1951, is examined.

² As in V. Zaslavsky, *The Neo-Stalinist State: Class, Ethnicity, and Consensus in Soviet Society* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1982), 44. His objection to totalitarianism was analytical, not ideological.

³ Legitimation and legitimacy are employed by Zaslavsky as synonyms, yet they suggest rather different things (see F. Parkin, *Max Weber* [London: Tavistock, 1982], chapter 3). Legitimations proceed from above: they are the claims that rulers make about themselves to project their authority. Legitimacy emanates from below: it amounts to subjects' voluntary compliance based on their acceptance of the rulers' right to rule. Instead of this distinction, Zaslavsky offers another one that largely mirrors it. This is between “subjective” and “objective” modes of legitimacy/legitimation. V. Zaslavsky, “The Problem

of Zaslavsky's objection to the concept of totalitarianism during the Brezhnev era.⁴ But when the cold war ended, totalitarianism moves from the periphery of his thinking to its center. Not only is the term henceforth vigorously defended against its critics;⁵ it is also extrapolated backward to encompass older arguments and rendered, with no discernible strain, harmonious with them.⁶ That congruity is felicitous for the analysis that follows because it enables me to treat Zaslavsky's various books and essays on the Soviet Union as parts of a wider argument—sometimes described specifically under a totalitarianism rubric, at other times without it,—rather than as phases of a disjointed intellectual trajectory.

Why—the question is irrepressible—did Zaslavsky wait until the 1990s, and especially the last decade of his life, to make a strong, explicit case for totalitarianism as a fundamental political and sociological category? Probably for the same reasons, in 2003, he explained the concept's more general rehabilitation.⁷ The Soviet Union's collapse rendered moot all speculation about any possibility of reform. For the first time it became possible to analyze the system's full trajectory or evolutionary cycle: birth, formation, maintenance, decay, collapse.⁸

of Legitimation in Soviet Society," in *Conflict and Control: Challenge to Legitimacy of Modern Governments*, ed. A.J. Vidich and R.M. Glassman (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1979), 159–202.

⁴ Zaslavsky, "The Problem of Legitimation in Soviet Society," 160.

⁵ A discernible change in tone is also evident in the Katyn writings. Whereas the writings on the Brezhnev era are sober and detached, those on Katyn, befitting the subject, are frankly more emotional. Hence we learn of "the most monstrous projects of class cleansing ever seen in human history," V. Zaslavsky, "The Katyn Massacre: 'Class Cleansing' as Totalitarian Praxis," translated by J. Cardinale, *Telos* 114 (1999): 67. See also note 44.

⁶ As in Zaslavsky, "The Katyn Massacre," 104–6; V. Zaslavsky, "The Post-Soviet Stage in the Study of Totalitarianism: New Trends and Methodological Tendencies," *Russian Law and Politics* 41 (2003): 44; V. Zaslavsky, "I sistemi totalitari nella prospettiva comparata," in *Totalitarismo e totalitarismi*, ed. V. Strada (Venezia: Marsilio, 2003), 112–14.

⁷ A switch in focus is also involved, as I explain later.

⁸ The term "empire" experienced a parallel journey to that of totalitarianism. Before its dissolution, the Soviet Union was typically described by scholars as a "state." Afterwards the taint of "empire" seemed more appropriate. Zaslavsky was ambivalent about this usage. While the Kremlin's military strategy trumped all other objectives, including ethnic and territorial, and while "the center held power and political control

As with Nazi Germany, the regime's history could now be studied in its entirety. Facilitating this reassessment was a wealth of official documents that became available for historians and social scientists to consult for the first time. Previously, scholars of the Soviet Union who might have considered *totalitarianism* as a serious interpretive framework were deterred from doing so, Zaslavsky declared, by "an objective inequality," in the volume and type of information to which they had access. Sovietologists during the regime's heyday, unlike contemporary researchers of Nazi Germany, faced a culture of secrecy and rigorously policed archives. When the Soviet Union imploded this check was, at least temporarily, lifted, allowing a full comparative study of the Nazi and Soviet regimes to take place.⁹ Intellectual disincentives to dismiss totalitarianism were in good part also removed. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the reemergence of Central and Eastern Europe as a continent of independent nations enabled a fresh look at the past unhindered by the communist-capitalist ideological fissure. As cooler, more detached appraisals of Bolshevism prevailed, totalitarianism seemed ever less conceptually radioactive. The left had long considered the concept suspicious: ideologically ill motivated, scandalous in emphasizing the structural similarities of the Soviet Union and its wartime foe Nazi Germany. Perennially dismayed by the left's apologetic stance vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, Zaslavsky had nothing invested in this kind of critique. He also knew that some of the most prominent oppositionists of Central Europe—for instance, Adam Michnik and Václav Havel—adapted totalitarianism to make sense of their own political situations. But the general climate of hostility toward the concept, whether partisan or scholarly, made it an uphill struggle to defend and, in any case, detracted from substantive arguments that could effectively be made in a nontotalitarian register: that is what *The Neo-Stalinist State*

and maintained a hierarchical distinction of production processes," the "redistributive and non-market aspects of the party-state and of the planned economy did not have much in common with the classic imperial model" of, say, the Habsburgs or the Ottomans. V. Zaslavsky, "The Soviet Union," in *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation Building*, ed. K. Barkey and M. von Hagen (Boulder, CO: Westview, [1994] 1997), 84–91.

⁹ V. Zaslavsky, *Class Cleansing: The Massacre at Katyn*, translated by K. Walker (New York: Telos Press, 2008), 47.

accomplished (though even neo-Stalinist—as distinct from post-Stalinist—secreted a totalitarian odor). Once the cold war was over, a space opened up for a more objective reassessment.¹⁰ Moreover, to those who still denied the appositeness of totalitarianism, Zaslavsky had a simple response: the onus fell on them to find a better comparative category.¹¹ That was no easy task because totalitarianism enjoyed the considerable benefit of bridging both history and sociology/political science.

It bears emphasis, too, that totalitarianism was not only refurbished as a result of a backward glance, the Owl of Minerva having alighted rapidly and in unseemly disarray from the Kremlin's turrets. The concept also proved attractive because post-cold war conflicts drew attention to one theory of totalitarianism in particular: Hannah Arendt's. Ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, Africa, and the Middle East; the reappearance on a large scale of stateless peoples; apocalyptic terror-movements: all seemed to step out of the pages of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Tellingly, Arendt's own rise to canonical status in political theory is itself a post-cold war phenomenon.

This chapter offers a systematic account of what Victor Zaslavsky meant by totalitarianism. It considers the ways in which his theory accords with and diverges from that of Hannah Arendt's. Arendt is significant for my discussion not because she strongly influenced Victor Zaslavsky. I see no evidence of that from his writings and some evidence to the contrary: Arendt is mentioned only in the most perfunctory way, —and is often classed with other totalitarian theorists whom she is no way resembled and on occasion flatly opposed: notably, Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski.¹² Nor, as Zaslavsky sometimes implies,¹³ did

¹⁰ Zaslavsky, "The Post-Soviet Stage in the Study of Totalitarianism," 39. On the "virtual" historiographical war that shadowed the cold war, see E. Aga-Rossi and V. Zaslavsky, *Stalin and Togliatti: Italy and the Origins of the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, [1997] 2011), 4, 22. The authors, showing no conceptual squeamishness, discuss the post-1945 "competition between the Soviet totalitarian system and the liberal democratic West" (16).

¹¹ Zaslavsky, "The Post-Soviet Stage in the Study of Totalitarianism," 43.

¹² See Zaslavsky, *The Neo-Stalinist State*, 44; V. Zaslavsky, "L'esperienza sovietica," in *Nazismo, Fascismo, Comunismo. Totalitarismi a Confronto*, ed. M. Flores, (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 1998), 105; Zaslavsky, V. Zaslavsky, *Le Massacre de Katyn. Crime et mensonge* (Paris: Editions du Rocher, 2003), 36.

¹³ Zaslavsky, "The Katyn Massacre," 67.

Arendt envisage totalitarianism as a “model,” a “syndrome,” a “paradigm,” or an “ideal type,” a vocabulary inflected with neo-Kantianism and social scientific nominalism from which she recoiled. If Arendt is privileged here for purposes of authorial comparison it is because first, she is today the most influential theorist of totalitarianism against whom all successors must be measured; second, because a lineage between her and Zaslavsky has, in a sense, already been established: his book on the Katyn massacre was awarded the Hannah Arendt Prize for Political Thought in 2008;¹⁴ and, third, because Zaslavsky’s work may be read as a major departure from Arendt’s that nonetheless cleaves to the concept of totalitarianism. Superficially, the Russian-born author seems only to elaborate on Arendt’s core argument about the nature of Bolshevism and National Socialism. He accepts *inter alia* her claims that totalitarianism is a unique regime type and that ideology and terror are its most salient characteristics. Yet a closer reading of Zaslavsky’s studies of the Soviet Union and the lands it dominated shows significant and original deviations from Arendt’s arguments, particularly regarding the extent and modes of totalitarian longevity. Whereas Arendt considered totalitarianism in the Soviet Union to have expired with the death of Stalin in 1953, Zaslavsky thought otherwise: totalitarianism persisted but in the new “system maintenance” form, embodied primarily in the Brezhnev era.

I begin with a primer on Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism so that the later comparison and contrast with Zaslavsky is easier to grasp. The bulk of this chapter pivots on his theoretical achievements, not hers.

¹⁴ The prize was awarded specifically for V. Zaslavsky, *Klassensäuberung. Das Massaker von Katyn* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 2007). The book’s title is identical to that used in the second Italian edition (*Pulizia di classe. Il massacro di Katyn* [Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006]); the English translation (*Class Cleansing*) followed suit. All are different from the original Italian version (*Il massacro di Katyn. Il crimine e la menzogna* [Rome: Ideazione, 1998]) and its French translation (*Le Massacre de Katyn. Crime et mensonge*). While the German and English titles, following the second Italian edition, flag *class cleansing* as the book’s subtitle their Italian (first edition) and French counterparts weigh Katyn principally as a *crime* and a *lie*. Differences in the book’s content are also discernible. The Italian (first edition) and French versions are split almost evenly between commentary and documents—Communist Party memoranda detailing the string of decisions that eventuated in mass murder at Katyn. By contrast, the German and English language texts truncate and splice some of the documents into a more rounded interpretive essay.

Movement

Among political theorists of domination, Hannah Arendt (1906–75) is famous for her claim that the twentieth century witnessed only two fully fledged totalitarian regimes: the Soviet Union from 1930 to Stalin's death in 1953¹⁵ and the Third Reich from 1938 until its military annihilation in 1945.¹⁶ Neither Italian fascism nor Japanese militarism were totalitarian. It is true that she fluctuated a bit over the People's Republic of China; Arendt was unable to decide whether or not the Maoist government belonged in the totalitarian stable. The more important point is her insistence that the totalitarian family comprised a grouping both small and sui generis around which tight historical, political, and analytical boundaries could be drawn. Arendt was equally insistent that "totalitarianism" is a mode of domination so drastic and unprecedented that all orthodox categories of understanding are powerless to make sense of it. Accordingly, totalitarianism is not to be confused with authoritarianism or tyranny, regime types that have far more limited goals and powers than their twentieth-century successors. Failure to recognize the differences among these modes of government is tantamount to ignoring the distinction "in principle between the restriction of freedom in authoritarian regimes, the abolition of political freedom in tyrannies and dictatorships, and the total elimination of spontaneity itself, that is, of the most general and most elementary manifestation of human freedom, at which only totalitarian regimes aim by means of their various methods of conditioning."¹⁷ Tyrannies, for instance, seek to liquidate their overt opponents, eviscerate the public realm, and isolate those over whom they rule. The tyrant is he "who rules as one against all, and the 'all' he oppresses are all equal, namely equally

¹⁵ For a short period, she thought that the Khrushchev government was also totalitarian; see the section on "Totalitarian Formation and Maintenance in Soviet Society" in this chapter.

¹⁶ Here I draw on P. Baehr, "Totalitarianism in America? Robert Nisbet on the 'Wilson War State' and Beyond," *American Sociologist* 45 (2014): 84–102.

¹⁷ H. Arendt, "What Is Authority?" in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, [1958] 1968), 96.

powerless.”¹⁸ Fear is used to instill obedience. But once obedience is given, and political passivity—a “graveyard peace”—is achieved, the tyrant’s key objectives have been realized. Family life and domestic relations are left relatively intact and unaffected. In contrast, the signature characteristic of totalitarianism is terror, rather than simple intimidation, a terror that intensifies after the regime has dispatched its real opponents. For the primary foes of both Nazism and Stalinism, after initial resistance is overcome, are not real miscreants defined by intent and active resistance; they are “objective enemies” or “enemies of the people,” defined by ascribed characteristics such as race or class. It makes no material difference to the regime that persons subsumed under these categories may, as individuals, be compliant and would, given the opportunity, acquiesce to the regime’s initiatives. Death by category, dictated by the laws of race or history, is not to be deflected by such stolid pragmatism. The terminus of totalitarian detention is the camp system whose primary rationale, even more than extermination, is to deprive its captives of plurality, spontaneity, in a word, agency.

Moreover, where objective enemies cannot immediately be found, they must be invented. Thus the primary task of the secret police is not the prevention of actual crimes, but the prediction, creation, and subsequent neutralization of potential ones. The ascent of the SS and of the Cheka and its progeny (GPU [State political directorate], OGPU [Joint State political directorate], NKVD [People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs], etc.) over the army as the organ of domestic and foreign coercion was, for Arendt, among the most fundamental characteristics of totalitarian domination. The secret police is the arm of totalitarian terror, the “essence” of totalitarian domination itself, and, in tandem with the Leader, the progenitor of lies (the more fantastic the better), fabrications, and conspiracy—the Trotskyist plot, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

Most regimes, tyrannical or otherwise, impose hierarchy on their subjects, offering thereby a modicum of repressive stability and predictability to society as a whole. Equally, regimes that are swept into power by social movements typically jettison, marginalize or discipline

¹⁸ Ibid., 99.

them once the new order is consolidated. Totalitarian rule is different. The movement continues violently to animate the regime. Stability and predictability are replaced by ceaseless turbulence. Instead of hierarchy, totalitarianism is characterized by “shapelessness” and a protean tension between party and state.¹⁹ For National Socialism, the key mechanism of totalitarian radicalization is the never-ending search for new categories of aliens to liquidate. Its Bolshevik counterpart is the purge whose institutionalization devours both the children of the revolution and their successors, as wave after wave of party and police bureaucrats are masticated by the regime.²⁰ Ironically, those who are most committed to the government’s cause are also the most likely candidates for eradication, because commitment may indicate individual volition and volition inconstancy. The only truly reliable people for the regime are those without strong opinions, “functionaries” whose pliability renders them useful instruments of the totalitarian apparatus.²¹

Still, terror alone is insufficient to determine the behavior of totalitarian subjects. Terror determines what must be done, but not what to think—or rather what not to think. Adapting Montesquieu, Arendt argued that while terror is the essence of totalitarianism, ideology is its “principle of action” (or substitute for such a principle) whose axiomatic force allows no contradiction or dissonance among those who count as its adherents. Ideologies are more than general attitudes, ideal interests or *Weltanschauungen*, and they are recognized principally by their structure rather than their variable content. They entail total

¹⁹ H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace [1951] 1973), 395.

²⁰ Compare Arendt’s argument with M. Mann, “The Contradictions of Continuous Revolution,” in *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison*, ed. I. Kershaw and Moshe Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 135–57. See also Ian Kershaw’s remark that “a ‘settling down’ into the staid authoritarianism of a Francoesque kind is scarcely conceivable in the case of Nazism. Here, the dynamic was ceaseless, the momentum of radicalization an accelerating one incapable of having the brakes put on—unless the ‘system’ itself were to be fundamentally altered.” I. Kershaw, “‘Working Towards the Führer’: Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship,” in *Stalinism and Nazism*, 95–96. Neither Mann nor Kershaw, however, are enamored with the concept of totalitarianism.

²¹ H. Arendt, “Mankind and Terror,” in *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*, ed. J. Kohn (New York: Harcourt Brace [1953] 1994), 305.

explanations of not only what is but also what will be, conceived as moments of a grand historical process in which actual events have no meaning, substance, or import other than their wholly instrumental role in establishing World Communism or the Thousand Year Reich. The allure of ideologies resides in their ability to simplify a complex world into one necessary postulate whose grip on the mind is simultaneously mesmerizing and compelling (the “merciless dialectics” of communism; Hitler’s professed enchantment with “ice cold reasoning”). Intellectually comatose to new experiences, conspiratorial in outlook, eager to subsume awkward realities under pre-established formulae, the subjects of ideology have, in effect, stopped thinking for and among themselves. Yet that debility is explicable. Faced with a world characterized by “uprootedness,” disintegration, and superfluity, ideology provides a refuge and compensation for those “masses”—people devoid of any discernible human bond, the *disjecta membra* of war, collapse of empire, economic catastrophe—who have no purpose other than to serve the predatory teleology of the movement.

Aside from considering ideology and terror, Arendt also ponders the role of leaders in totalitarianism. She observes: “The totalitarian form of government depends entirely upon the fact that a movement, and not a party, has taken power . . . so that instead of the tyrant’s brutal determination and the dictator’s demagogic ability to keep himself in power at all costs, we find the totalitarian leader’s single-minded attention directed to the acceleration of the movement itself.”²²

Whereas tyrants are contemptuous of all laws other than those they have made, totalitarian rulers claim to be the executors or instruments of “laws” of race or class struggle that are inexorable and that demand that inferiors be culled and the socially obsolescent be eliminated. Totalitarian leaders seek to clear all impediments to these laws of motion, facilitating their passage and encouraging their acceleration.²³ Arendt described Hitler and Stalin as the movement’s

²² H. Arendt, “Authority in the Twentieth Century,” *Review of Politics* 18 (1956): 8.

²³ She added that in “contradistinction to both tyrannical and authoritarian regimes, the proper image of a totalitarian ruler and organization seems to be the structure of the onion, in whose center, in a kind of empty space, the leader is located; whatever he does . . . he does it from within, and not from without or above.” Arendt, “What Is Authority?,” 99.

“center,” “the ‘motor’ that swings it into motion.”²⁴ “The machine that generates, organizes, and spreads the monstrous falsehoods of totalitarian movements depends again upon the position of the Leader,” a man who uniquely divines the laws of race or history and whose prognostications—couched in centuries or millennia—can never be disproved by facts. Cocooned from the elite formations—SS, NKVD militants—by a court or “inner circle,” the Leader transmits by osmosis “an aura of impenetrable mystery.” And within this inner circle the leader maintains ascendancy through his capacity for productive intrigue, his ability to shuffle personnel to maximize insecurity, and his skill in handling rivalries within the party. Everyone, including the entourage and ministries, knows that their power has no independent basis of justification; it springs “directly from the Leader without the intervening levels of a functioning hierarchy.” Instead of authority that, even when repressive, operates according to an idea of limits, totalitarian domination tends towards the abolition of freedom and the elimination of responsibility. The leader’s rule is fluid, impetuous, domineering; his voluntaristic language—“the never-resting, dynamic ‘will of the Fuehrer’”—a much more accurate guide to his rule than the leader-principle.²⁵

It bears recalling that by the late 1950s, Arendt had mostly stopped writing about the Soviet Union. Stray comments about it appear in her unpublished lectures and her books but mostly Arendt moved on to consider other subjects: revolution (the American and the French, not the Russian); Adolf Eichmann and the new kind of bureaucratic murderer he represented; political crises during the Johnson and Nixon administrations; thinking, willing, and judging: the triptych that make up the life of the mind. Only twice did she seek to update her analysis of totalitarianism.²⁶ In 1958, the *Journal of Politics* published an article by

²⁴ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 373.

²⁵ Quotes in Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, respectively, 405, 365, 404. “The will of the Fuehrer can be embodied everywhere and at all times, and he himself is not tied to any hierarchy, not even the one he might have established.” Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 405.

²⁶ Less significant is the unpublished “A Reconsideration of Stalinism”—a talk prepared for the Columbia “University Seminar on Communism, 1971–1972—in which Arendt

Arendt titled “Totalitarian Imperialism: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution.” Though mostly an appreciation of the Hungarian uprising of two years before—dramatic confirmation, Arendt believed, of the power of unexpected events to illuminate man’s essential freedom—it contains a section devoted to “Russia after Stalin’s Death.”²⁷ Here Arendt contends that in all significant respects the Khrushchev transition remains firmly within totalitarian bounds. The recent decree promulgated against “social parasites,” an intensified internal policing of writers by their unions, the so-called rationalization of the economy, which will produce ever more atomization—all of these policies are consistent with totalitarianism as she understood it. The only difference Arendt discerns is that what Stalin sought to do by purge and by “permanent revolution,” Khrushchev aims to achieve in a more institutionalized manner.²⁸ But even that is conditional; if threatened, the new government may resort once more to the purge system.²⁹

reviews books by Nadezhda Mandelstam, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Roy Medvedev, *The Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress* (Series: Subject File, 1949–75, n.d.), <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/arendthtml/mharendtFolder04.html>. The gist of the talk is that these authors provide intriguing, and previously undocumented, details of Stalin’s regime but nothing new about it in essentials. In that sense, the title of the talk is a misnomer.

²⁷ Another section examines the satellite system.

²⁸ Arendt does not elaborate on this point but, as we shall see, it is central to Zaslavsky’s notion of “system-maintenance.”

²⁹ She noted two constraints on a return to Stalin’s methods. Depopulation of the Russian people, on account of war and previous purges, meant that there was less human material for totalitarianism to consume (she believed that only states with large populations—that is with enough people to waste—were capable of full blown totalitarian systems). The second constraint was the emergence of Communist China as an ideological competitor. Ironically, Arendt believed that Mao had saved the Chinese from massive depopulation whereas, in fact, his regime from the beginning was killing huge numbers. The Great Leap Forward that commenced in the very year her article was published, is believed to have killed between eighteen and forty-five million people. See the landmark studies of J. Becker (*Hungry Ghosts. China’s Secret Famine* [London: John Murray, 1996] and F. Dikötter (*The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution, 1945–1957* [New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011] and *Mao’s Great Famine: The History of China’s Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958–1962* [London: Walker and Company, 2013]). Arendt’s view of China is discussed in P. Baehr, “China the Anomaly. Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism and the Maoist Regime,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 9 (2010): 267–86.

The second major discussion of the Soviet Union in Arendt's later writings appears in the preface to the 1967 edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.³⁰ Here she is emphatic that the USSR is no longer totalitarian. Since 1953, she says, "it is undeniable that the huge police empire [has been] liquidated, that most of the concentration camps [have been] dissolved, that no new purges against 'objective enemies' have been introduced, and that conflicts between members of the new 'collective leadership' are now being resolved by demotion and exile from Moscow rather than by show trials, confessions, and assassinations."³¹ Revising her evaluation of Khrushchev, she acknowledges that his rule was not a "temporary 'thaw'" but "an authentic, though never unequivocal process of detotalitarization."³² Just as totalitarianism in the Soviet Union grew out of a one-party dictatorship, so it reverted to it post-Stalin.³³ Yet Arendt is unequivocal that her original analysis of totalitarianism is sound: totalitarianism means permanent revolution—"instability is a functional requisite of total domination." It means that a movement, in distinction to a party, has seized power. It means that material, utilitarian interests are constantly sacrificed to ideological consistency.³⁴ The absence of these features in the Soviet Union was proof positive that totalitarianism no longer existed. From this contention, as we are about to see, Victor Zaslavsky sharply dissented.

From Political Theory to Social Science

Aside from writing on totalitarianism and exhibiting a dogged independence of mind, Victor Zaslavsky and Hannah Arendt share two obvious attributes: both were nonpracticing Jews, and both emigrated

³⁰ Arendt states that the 1967 edition "took into account some of the more important events after Stalin's death—the successor crisis and Khrushchev's speech at the Twentieth Party Congress—as well as new information on the Stalin regime from recent publications. Thus I revised Part III and the last chapter of Part II." Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, xxiv.

³¹ Ibid., xxxv.

³² Ibid., xxv.

³³ Ibid., xxxvii.

³⁴ Ibid., xxxiv, 23n.

reluctantly from the nations of their birth.³⁵ In Arendt's case, leaving Germany in 1933 was a matter of life or death. For Zaslavsky, remaining in the Soviet Union after 1975—he was by then blacklisted as “politically unreliable”—promised a life of marginalization for himself and, more important in his priorities, for his son whose odds of gaining university admission were far from certain owing to unofficial Jewish quotas.³⁶ Yet in most other respects the biographies of the Russian and German scholars diverge. It is not just that, unlike Arendt, Zaslavsky was actually raised in a totalitarian country—his birth in Leningrad coincided with the Great Terror—or that, as a young child, he was compelled to flee the invasion of Stalin's erstwhile totalitarian ally, Nazi Germany.³⁷ His scholarly predilection was also different from hers. Arendt was by formation a philosopher, later a political theorist. In contrast, Zaslavsky's professional trajectory began under duress in the applied sciences. Disbarred by vestiges of Stalin's “anti-cosmopolitanism” campaign from entering Leningrad State University to study history and literature, Zaslavsky wound up in the Mining Institute

³⁵ On “official” (Stalinist) and “pragmatic” (neo-Stalinist) modes of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, see Zaslavsky, *The Neo-Stalinist State*, 17. Under Stalin's rule, the employment of Jews was expressly prohibited “within the party apparatus, the armed forces, state administration, the diplomatic service, foreign trade, and various other sectors.” In the 1970s, by contrast, anti-Semitism worked tacitly as a form of social closure. Fueling it was an “overproduction of specialists” and hence fierce competition in the Soviet Union for scientific, technical and related jobs. Anti-Semitism was also actively promoted during the 1960s by intellectuals associated with the journals *Molodaia gvardiia* and *Nash sovremennik*. “The notion of a Jewish or Zionist conspiracy against the Russian people . . . helped to expiate Stalinism and shift the responsibility for the destruction of the Russian peasantry and culture from the Bolshevik regime to a small and unpopular ethnic minority.” V. Zaslavsky, “The Evolution of Separatism in Soviet Society under Gorbachev,” in *From Union to Commonwealth: Nationalism and Separatism in the Soviet Republics*, ed. G.W. Lapidus and V. Zaslavsky, with P. Goldman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 80. This intellectual current, Zaslavsky maintained, was as much a cry of pain at the extinction of earlier Russian society as it was an attack on Jews.

³⁶ The origins and dynamics of Soviet-Jewish immigration are explored in V. Zaslavsky, with R. J. Brym, *Soviet-Jewish Emigration and Soviet Nationality Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983).

³⁷ The story of this flight is told in V. Zaslavsky, “Nadezhda” [Hope], translated by Judith Adler, *Society* 52:4 (2015), 372–377.

where the state's need for engineers took precedence over ideology. He employed the experience to good effect: field trips to far-flung Soviet republics facilitated a number of unofficial sociological studies that are reported in *The Neo-Stalinist State*.³⁸ Once immigration enabled greater occupational freedom, Zaslavsky moved enthusiastically into the social sciences, an identity and, more important, a way of thinking that marks a decisive break between his and Arendt's approaches to totalitarianism. She abhorred the social sciences, believing them to be inherently incapable of grasping the unprecedented nature of totalitarian regimes.³⁹ Zaslavsky's view was just the opposite. On his reckoning, the resources of the social sciences, when harnessed to historical investigation, were invaluable to the serious student of actually existing Marxism. Interviews, questionnaires, surveys, and archival research—honed by ample statistical computation—generously leaven his theory of totalitarianism. Similarly, his lexicon of “system,” “ethnic group,” “social mobility,” “social stratification,” “socialization,” “legitimacy,” “charisma,” and the distinction between structure and culture all attest to Zaslavsky's allegiance to sociological reasoning.⁴⁰ As he remarked:

The major lesson to be drawn from decades of scholarly debate in the field of Soviet studies is that using an eclectic, multidisciplinary combination of paradigms from various social sciences provides a sound scientific approach for understanding the Soviet system as a novel form of social organization. The same eclectic approach is useful for articulating consistent theoretical accounts of continuity and

³⁸ I owe this information to V. Zubok, “In Memoriam: Victor Zaslavsky, 1937–2009,” *Slavic Review* 69 (2010): 535–37, email correspondence with Alexander Zaslavsky, and to conversations with Volker Meja.

³⁹ “Events, past and present—not social forces and historical trends, nor questionnaires and motivation research, nor any other gadgets in the arsenal of the social sciences—are the true, the only reliable teachers of political scientists, as they are the most trustworthy source of information for those engaged in politics” (H. Arendt, “Totalitarian Imperialism: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution,” *Journal of Politics* 20 (1958): 8. Arendt's critique of social sciences is explored in P. Baehr, *Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism, and the Social Sciences* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ Zaslavsky not only employed social science findings, he also, as mentioned previously, conducted sociological research himself, often as part of a team effort; see, notably, Zaslavsky, *The Neo-Stalinist State*.

change in that organization, beyond the well-known manifestations of totalitarianism as a political regime. It allows us to examine both the complex interconnections between the Soviet political order, and its economic, cultural and structural underpinnings, and the position of the Soviet state in the developing world system. On the one hand, the particular identity of the Soviet system was determined by both its essential, “genetic” features and its developmental characteristics that express the internal logic of the system’s functioning. On the other hand, this identity was forged in the process of interaction between the Soviet Union and its rapidly mutating international environment.⁴¹

The foregoing affirmation, however, was by no means incompatible with a range of ideas that Arendt forcefully advanced. Not least among them was a defense of totalitarianism as a term that indicated an unprecedented regime encompassing both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union—a contention that many political theorists, historians and sociologists since the 1920s resolutely denied. Some preferred the antique nomenclature of dictatorship and despotism and rejected totalitarianism as a redundant or hyperbolic category. Others willingly accepted totalitarianism as a novel species of government but restricted its use to National Socialism. Still others also adjudged totalitarianism a valid notion but construed liberal democracy as another of its modes. Zaslavsky dissented vigorously from all three of these positions.⁴² In his

⁴¹ Zaslavsky, “The Soviet Union,” 76.

⁴² Zaslavsky, “The Katyn Massacre,” 98–101. Although he did not address them, Zaslavsky would also have rejected two other accounts of totalitarianism that portray the United States as totalitarian in various phases of its history. The first is R. Nisbet’s argument in *The Present Age: Progress and Anarchy in Modern America* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, [1988] 2003) that the first totalitarian experiment of the twentieth century was conducted by Woodrow Wilson’s administration during the Great War. The other is the claim by S.S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1960] 2004) and S.S. Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) that modern America represents a condition of “inverted totalitarianism,” namely, “the political coming of age of corporate power and the political demobilization of the citizenry” (Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated*, x). Nisbet’s analysis, while exaggerated and ultimately unconvincing, at least bears some resemblance to the concept of totalitarianism as Arendt and Zaslavsky understood it; Wolin’s argument, by contrast, is conceptually incoherent. Logically, inverted

account, as in Arendt's, totalitarianism was both a valid notion and a bounded one. He rejected both its compression to Nazi Germany alone and its extrapolation to constitutional liberal states, a posture he acidly described as "nonsense at the level of common sense and . . . on all levels of abstraction."⁴³ The more general point, aimed at intransigent opponents of totalitarianism, was that renouncing the concept creates serious problems for historians and social scientists alike.

First, it cuts them off from the rich tradition of totalitarianism studies, based on the efforts of at least three generations of observers and scholars. . . . Second, it creates an impenetrable barrier between history and sociology or political science, where "totalitarianism" has become an indispensable tool for analyzing the new social structures and forms of domination that emerged in the twentieth century.⁴⁴ Third, the mere listing of differences between Nazism and Stalinism, without any special theory and without a special language to describe and interpret totalitarian regimes, often vulgarizes historical scholarship.⁴⁵

Totalitarianism was a compelling concept because it bridged two regimes that for all their differences were rooted in a common project and not dissimilar methods. "Ideological terror based on the notion

totalitarianism is not totalitarianism at all but the most democratic regime imaginable, just as inverted democracy would be despotism and inverted atheism would be a devout belief in God.

⁴³ See Zaslavsky, "The Katyn Massacre," 98–101 for a robust defense of the concept of totalitarianism that inter alia indignantly rebuts Alex Delfini and Paul Piccone's claim that liberal democracy, especially in the United States, is a totalitarian legatee of "Enlightenment ideology" (A. Delfini and P. Piccone, "Modernity, Libertarianism and Critical Theory: Reply to Pellicani," *Telos* 112 [1998]: 23–46). For Zaslavsky, such a view—first postulated by Horkheimer and Adorno—was "an understandable reaction of intellectuals, especially those who perceive themselves as New Class outcasts and misfits, to their failure to impose their projects of radical change on a recalcitrant society" (Zaslavsky, "The Katyn Massacre," 101). This scathing indictment does not appear in the book on Katyn (in any of its editions). An esteemed friend of Zaslavsky, Piccone thrived on intellectual combat. Characteristically, Zaslavsky's rebuke was published in the journal Piccone owned and edited. In turn, the English edition of *Katyn* is dedicated "In memory of Paul Piccone 1940–2004."

⁴⁴ Consider such prominent theorists as Carl Friedrich, Zbigniew Brezinski, Karl Wittfogel, Barrington Moore, Chalmers Johnson, and Jeane Kirkpatrick. Zaslavsky, "The Post-Soviet Stage in the Study of Totalitarianism," 35, 57 fn. 5 also referred to recent Russian debates.

⁴⁵ Zaslavsky, "The Post-Soviet Stage in the Study of Totalitarianism," 43.

of cleansing society of foreign and deleterious elements, of parasites, i.e., of those belonging to the antagonistic ethnic group or social class regarded as an enemy, constitutes the common denominator of the Nazi and Soviet regimes.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, totalitarianism offers an illuminating historical backdrop and “a strong methodological foundation for the analysis and interpretation of complex social processes during the post-totalitarian transitional period”⁴⁷—in other words, it was difficult to grasp and measure the extent of change in the Russian Federation if one denied oneself the insights that the concept of totalitarianism furnished. At the same time, Zaslavsky was open to, and sometimes enthusiastic about, other models beside totalitarianism where they offered pertinent insights. Of special significance to his later work was that of militarized industrialism, a hybrid that had in part been anticipated by Herbert Spencer and was later developed by the comparativist scholar, Andrew Janos.⁴⁸

If we take from the above a simple message—Zaslavsky’s commitment to pragmatism in historical and social scientific research—we are able best to appreciate both his agreements with Hannah Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism and his radical departures from it. I begin with the agreements.

The Arendtian Connection and its Limits

“As Hannah Arendt famously demonstrated, what is new and unprecedented in totalitarianism is the invention of a new type of crime—crime against humanity, the frontal attack on the fundamental principle of humanity’s plurality.” Arendt was also correct to say that “Soviet mass terror had little in common with the terror of old style despotic regimes.”⁴⁹ Totalitarian governments condemn individuals not for what they do or have done but for who or, rather, what they are:

⁴⁶ Zaslavsky, *Class Cleansing*, 4–5.

⁴⁷ Zaslavsky, “The Post-Soviet Stage in the Study of Totalitarianism,” 56.

⁴⁸ See, for example, A.C. Janos, “What Was Communism: A Retrospective in Comparative Analysis,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 29 (1996): 2 et passim. See also Zaslavsky, “The Soviet Union,” 76–77.

⁴⁹ Zaslavsky, *Class Cleansing*, 45.

members of a group that the tribunal of History judges to be an impediment to the dialectic's realization of the perfect, tension-free society. Possessed by the ambition to create a new kind of person in a new kind of society, the Bolshevik regime, as much as its Nazi counterpart, "pursued the goal of eliminating not only [its] political opponents, but entire societal groups damned by reason of their very existence: 'objective enemies' and 'enemies of the people.'"⁵⁰

Zaslavsky further notes, much like Arendt did before him, that the Bolsheviks fully understood the meaning of positive laws; the Soviet Union's various constitutions, after all, contained and claimed to uphold a plethora of rights and freedoms. But on Stalin's interpretation and that of his close collaborators, Marxist ideology trumped all that merely mortal men created. The function of the communist regime was to accelerate the process of extinction that history itself had mandated so that a socially purified civilization could come into being. Death by category, the liquidation of all "socially alien" groups—bourgeois, kulak, noble, cleric—was the result. Accordingly, just as Nazi Germany sought to erase Jews and other ethnic collectivities from the face of the earth, so the early Soviet Union embarked on a project of "class cleansing": the purgation of particular groups within Polish society rather than the elimination of the Poles as a people.⁵¹ And just as "Auschwitz became the epitome of 'ethnic cleansing,' so the Katyn Massacre can serve as the epitome of 'class cleansing.'" ⁵²

Why was the mass murder of over 25,000 Polish citizens by NKVD special commandos and auxiliaries during April and May 1940 a case of "class cleansing" as distinct from a war crime—the shooting of unarmed soldiers? It is customary to describe the Poles murdered in

⁵⁰ Zaslavsky, *Class Cleansing*, 45, 5. See also V. Zaslavsky, "Il nemico oggettivo: il totalitarismo e i suoi bersagli interni," in *Gulag, il sistema dei lager in URSS*, ed. M. Flores and F. Gori (Milano: Mazzotta, 1999), 29–37. In the Soviet case, the extermination of "objective enemies" began in Lenin's time. Zaslavsky quotes the words of M. Latsis, the Cheka leader, who defined the Red Terror as follows: "Do not seek in your accusation proof of whether the prisoner has rebelled against the Soviets with guns or by word. You must ask him, first, what class he belongs to, what his social origin is, what his education was, and his profession. The answers must determine the fate of the accused" (Zaslavsky, "The Problem of Legitimation in Soviet Society," 164).

⁵¹ Zaslavsky, *Class Cleansing*, 43.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 5. See also Zaslavsky, "Il nemico oggettivo."

the forests of Katyn as officers, yet most were reservists—police officers, priests, university faculty, school teachers, landowners, border agents—rather than career military men; in other words, they were representatives of the intellectual and professional class that led Polish society. To be sure, the Poles were killed because Beria's spies and interrogators concluded that their captives, for reasons of patriotism, religion, and political predilection, were implacable foes of the Soviet state and likely to remain so. Re-education, to the extent to which it had briefly been tried, had spectacularly failed. Yet Zaslavsky insists "that national security was only one aspect informing the resolutions of the Politburo and of the CPSU, and not even the most important one."⁵³ Proof that something more than state security was at stake is evidenced by the fact that the families of the executed officers were also marked for doom: transported from Eastern Poland—a Soviet condominium established by the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of August 23, 1939—to Kazakhstan and elsewhere. Most perished either en route or in the hostile conditions of their new islands of confinement. Since women, children, and the elderly were related to the condemned, "a strategy of calculated and systematic annihilation of an entire social class by totalitarian regimes whose foundational ideology is Marxism-Leninism"⁵⁴ logically applied to them as well. Deportation was a different purgation of Polish society from mass murder but the result was in both cases mostly the same. Even before the invasion of Poland, "forced cleansing," a term actually used in official Communist documents, was a pronounced feature of Soviet policy; of 144,000 Poles from the border regions arrested during the Great Terror, 111,000 were shot, condemned for "nationalism" and "betrayal of the Communist International." "All members of the Polish Party leadership residing in Moscow were executed."⁵⁵

The emphasis placed by Zaslavsky on mass terror guided by ideology appears quintessentially Arendtian.⁵⁶ So too does the symmetry he

⁵³ Zaslavsky, *Class Cleansing*, 36. The Politburo members who signed or soon after assented to the "blood pact" that issued in the massacre were Stalin, Voroshilov, Molotov, Mikoyan, Kalinin, and Kaganovich.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ In both the book on Katyn and in *The Neo-Stalinist State*, Zaslavsky writes extensively on the role of propaganda as a mode of ideological coordination. Arendt's treatment of propaganda was different. For her propaganda is a mode of dissimulation intended

establishes between ethnic and class cleansing; both are methodically planned attacks on human plurality. “Organized lying,” another Arendtian theme, is also amply documented by Zaslavsky,⁵⁷ as is the investigation of the “structural affinities between the ideology of Nazi Germany and the Stalinist regime.”⁵⁸ Finally, she would doubtlessly have appreciated his discussion of the synchronization of Nazi and Soviet conduct once the regimes had decided on Poland’s amputation. This totalitarian axis that swapped prisoners and where elements deemed alien to one party were deported by the other for captivity or death—German Communists who fled to the Soviet Union, for instance, were returned to Nazi jurisdiction—poignantly confirmed her view of the essential unity of the two regimes despite all doctrinal niceties to the contrary. So did the secret supplementary protocols entered into by both parties to divide the European continent between them.⁵⁹

Zaslavsky’s writings on Katyn are, it is fair to say, essentially an empirical extension of Arendt’s theory. *Class Cleansing: The Massacre at Katyn* is a brilliant reconstruction of the background, rationale, planning, execution and aftermath of a horrific event, but it is, in all significant respects, a confirmation of the framework she established in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Even the idea of the “liquidation of classes” can be found in that book, though Arendt does not use the term “class cleansing.”⁶⁰ That deflationary conclusion stands qualified,

for the outside world; within totalitarian states, on the other hand, it is indoctrination that is practiced. See chapter II of Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

⁵⁷ Though it is George Orwell, rather than Arendt, whom he is quoting: Zaslavsky, *Class Cleansing*, 73. The control of language—an Orwell staple—in a regime demanding “total censorship,” is a theme of V. Zaslavsky, *Censura* (Rome: Treccani. 1991), ch. 5, section c.

⁵⁸ Zaslavsky, *Class Cleansing*, 112–13, 107.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁶⁰ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 320. The social classes she mentions are “the property owning classes, the new middle class in the cities, and the peasants.” She also mentions the destruction of the working class as a solidary entity, and of the old bureaucracy. Sometimes she means by liquidation the brute physical elimination of a class or stratum; at other times she means its decomposition; at still other times, she means both. Like Zaslavsky, however, she argues that “none of these immense sacrifices in human life was motivated by a *raison d’état* in the old sense of the term.” Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 321. The classes or strata were smashed, she affirms, not because they were hostile to the new state. They were destroyed because the goal of

however, once we examine the sum of Zaslavsky's work on Soviet society. When we do, we see that his later employment of totalitarianism constitutes nothing less than a fundamental challenge to the boundaries of Arendt's theory and many of the concepts she crafted for it. This challenge derives from a distinction that Zaslavsky first forged in an earlier period of his writing—the distinction between “system formation” and “system maintenance”—but which is later integrated into his theory of totalitarianism, the uppermost layer, as it were, of a discursive palimpsest.

Totalitarian Formation and Maintenance in Soviet Society

Victor Zaslavsky's chief contribution to the theory of totalitarianism is the argument that Soviet society experienced not one but two totalitarian moments: the Lenin-Stalin period and the Brezhnev era that followed a brief Khrushchev interregnum. Both moments are totalitarian in different ways, species of the same genus. The first era is that of permanent emergency, what Zaslavsky calls “the formative period” or the “system building” phase of the Soviet history;⁶¹ its duration spans the October Revolution to the earlier years of Khrushchev's rule; by the late fifties it is over. This phase is very much as Arendt described totalitarianism *tout court*: bloody, unpredictable, and generally chaotic, a veritable maelstrom of tumult that allows nothing to settle into the grooves of institutional normality. It is the period of collectivization, mass terror, purge, and war-time discipline; of ideological synchronization under a Communist Party vanguard when all resistant traces of the former society—religious denominations, independent artistic and cultural associations, trade unions—are ruthlessly repressed or simply annihilated; of the division and constant redivision of the populace into “socially close” elements, on the one hand, and “socially

totalitarian government is to atomize the population, to remove all impediments to the constant mobilization and ever renewed social reconstitution. Totalitarianism can only come about in nations of mass, isolated people.

⁶¹ Zaslavsky, “The Katyn Massacre,” 104–5.

alien”/“parasitical” groups/objective enemies, on the other.⁶² Terror is not general in the sense that everyone is terrorized all the time; it is general to the extent that that no person or group can ever be sure of their own safety or that of their family, friends and colleagues. Who could tell what the next victim-category would be? Despite these “elements of incomprehensibility and irrationality,”⁶³ Zaslavsky is adamant that “system-building,” this revolution from above, was informed by a goal, however humanly grotesque.⁶⁴ Only terror could mobilize the population to realize the scale of renovation that Stalin’s regime required: rapid, state mandated, military-industrial modernization. Terror was the coercive price of a high rate of accumulation; later it enabled a “crash conversion to a war economy.”⁶⁵

By the late 1950s, this phase was exhausted. Chronic shortages of labor—the legacy of regime directed slaughter of its own people, Nazi depredations during the war—were one symptom; systemic

⁶² *Ibid.*, 103; Zaslavsky, “Il nemico oggettivo.”

⁶³ Zaslavsky, “The Problem of Legitimation in Soviet Society,” 167. Here Zaslavsky distinguishes between two types of terror of the Stalin period. The first type is what he describes later as “class cleansing”; it is the elimination “as a class” of the kulaks “former noblemen and their families, and ‘owners of various small undertakings which emerged in the period of the New Economic Policy, and part of the old Russian intelligentsia, the so-called ‘bourgeois specialists.’” This zero-sum, coerced equalization, and redistribution benefited other citizens who profited from job vacancies, dispossessed houses, plots of land and personal belongings. Brutally, and at the price of a coarsened “moral consciousness,” it bolstered Stalin’s legitimacy among those who gained. The second type of terror was qualitatively different: erratic, unpredictable, irrational. It attacked former Bolsheviks, “objective enemies” and others. No group gained from it. But even this stratagem did not entirely alienate the Soviet people. They may have believed in the innocence or naivete of convicted family members, but they may also have thought that said members had been led astray by real enemies of the people. And the more the system proved insecure, the more its subjects looked to a leader and a clique to save it, a desperation reinforced by the “complete closure of state borders, the liquidation of free and independent exchange of information, the destruction of traditions and historical memory as well as rigid control over press and libraries” (*Ibid.*, 169–70).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 167. The Weberian phrase he uses (Zaslavsky, “The Soviet Union,” 77; Zaslavsky, “The Post-Soviet Stage in the Study of Totalitarianism,” 51) is “substantive rationality” but the term is so question begging that I prefer to use a simpler synonym.

⁶⁵ Zaslavsky, “The Soviet Union,” 76–77; see also Zaslavsky, “The Post-Soviet Stage in the Study of Totalitarianism,” 50.

inefficiency and gridlock in economic production, unloosed for many decades from market principles, were another; fear among ever more established elites for the security and reproduction of their privileges, a third. Moreover, the greater the consolidation of social and cultural institutions became, the more destabilizing the reintroduction of mass terror would be; the stakes for it were constantly rising.⁶⁶ The cumulative outcome of this pressure, in the early sixties, was the advent of the “system-maintenance” phase of totalitarianism that marked the USSR’s temporary stabilization.⁶⁷ No longer was Soviet existence pervaded by random terror and the incredulous response of its victims. A sense of normality, of a society embedded in the routines and practices of everyday life, began to solidify. But, then again, is not the very idea of stability, the cake of custom, and the sources of consensus it supposes, utterly inimical to the notion of totalitarianism, an oxymoron at best, and more likely a contradiction in terms? Only if one subscribes to Arendt’s view of totalitarianism and to the view of those who think like her. Even so, the skeptic asks: what is actually totalitarian about the system-maintenance phase? What connects the revolutionary to the consolidated phase of Soviet society such that totalitarianism is an appropriate term to straddle both? Zaslavsky’s answer is that for all the social and economic compromises the regime is compelled to make, the Soviet party-state remains politically supreme: party competition is unthinkable; the repressive spy apparatus menaces and continues to infiltrate all pores of society; dissidents are killed, exiled, imprisoned or committed to institutions for the clinically insane; jobs are denied to those deemed alien to Communist mores; travel restrictions are vigorously policed, cutting off Soviet citizens from the outside world;

⁶⁶ Zaslavsky, “The Post-Soviet Stage in the Study of Totalitarianism,” 50.

⁶⁷ He also calls this the “stationary” stage, a rather problematic label given Zaslavsky’s simultaneous arguments about the state’s vulnerability, strains, and myriad compromises (Zaslavsky, *The Neo-Stalinist State*, 66, 77, and 82). Later he would speak of the system’s “self-destructive internal contradictions” and the growing dysfunctionality of the USSR’s military-industrial order that blocked reforms that might have kept the Soviet Union intact (Zaslavsky, “The Post-Soviet Stage in the Study of Totalitarianism,” 51–52). No industrial society is truly inert, even a totalitarian one, but *stationary* does at least reveal the enormous gulf between a consolidated regime and one that subjects its subjects to permanent revolution.

indoctrination proceeds apace through a uniformity of teaching materials, through bans on foreign press and books, and through the jamming of radio and television communication.⁶⁸ Zaslavsky's conclusion is that while "recourse to mass terror" was no longer necessary, actual "control became more pervasive."⁶⁹ Such extremes simply do not exist under dictatorships or tyrannies or juntas. As he puts it in *The Neo-Stalinist State*, the "Brezhnev period can be seen as an endeavor to rationalize Stalin's political-economic system while preserving its essential nature."⁷⁰ The old system lay dormant in the new one; the Stalin cult of the 1970s, officially endorsed, suggested there was no shortage of people wishing to exhume a period of extremity;⁷¹ the persistence of "closed enterprises" were "the direct offspring of the reign of terror."⁷²

Moreover the distinction between two phases of totalitarianism not only avoids a thorny problem for most types of totalitarianism theory: how to explain the evolution of a totalitarian society into a society that is not totalitarian. The two-phase distinction also enables one to offer a proper basis for regime comparison. Consider, for instance, the case of the German Democratic Republic during the 1980s. Was it totalitarian or not? Arendt's answer, had she lived to see it, was bound

⁶⁸ Zaslavsky, "The Soviet Union," 79; Zaslavsky, "The Katyn Massacre," 105.

⁶⁹ Zaslavsky, "The Katyn Massacre," 105.

⁷⁰ Zaslavsky, *The Neo-Stalinist State*, 131.

⁷¹ Official support of the cult, particularly as evidenced in literature and film, struck two notes of mystification. The first asserted that there were no innocent victims; if Stalin was ruthless, he was so to protect the people against its enemies. The second claimed that even if there were victims, they were at least now rehabilitated (mostly posthumously); if Stalin had erred, he had done so with the best intentions and was poorly advised; his mistakes were excusable. The Stalin cult appealed to youth seeking idealism in a drab country, to workers employed in so-called closed enterprises (industries of supposed vital importance to the state, and whose entry brought monetary and other privileges at the cost of full compliance), and to the old guard, many of whom began their careers during Stalin's time and whose legitimacy had been shaken by Khrushchev's denunciation. The old guard could no more renounce Stalin than it could renounce itself. Intellectuals, too, had a stake in the cult because Stalin's anti-Jewish policies reduced job and status competition. See Zaslavsky, *The Neo-Stalinist State*, 121.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 36.

to be in the negative. Where was mass terror and the febrile, perennial mobilization of GDR citizens, where were the purges, where was the fanatical ideology of “merciless dialectics”? Zaslavsky’s answer was more nuanced. In 1994 the Bundestag debated whether Nazi Germany and the GDR were similar systems. Concluding, with little difficulty, that they were not led some commentators also to deduce that the GDR was not totalitarian. Zaslavsky argued that this inference, apparently impeccable, was deeply confused. To be sure, Nazi Germany and the GDR were different formations. But this was not because the GDR was not totalitarian. The GDR was neither like Nazi Germany nor completely dissimilar from a totalitarian regime; it was a totalitarian regime in consolidated, normalized—systems-maintenance—guise.

A meaningful comparison [between Nazi Germany and the later GDR] presupposes the distinction between the system-building and system-maintenance stages, since only by analyzing totalitarian regimes at the same developmental stage is it possible to demonstrate parallels and differences within a common framework. Since Nazism and fascism had been destroyed before they could enter the stage of “normal” functioning, an in-depth analysis of the maintenance and slow decay of Soviet-type systems now has become the main direction of comparative totalitarian studies. Empirically-grounded studies of the Soviet experience are crucial to overcoming the main weakness of applying the totalitarianism concept to the Cold War period, when Soviet totalitarianism had undergone a qualitative transition to the system-maintenance stage.⁷³

Arendt’s problem, Zaslavsky believed, was that she modeled her theory of total domination on Nazi Germany whose historical journey was cut short after only twelve years by military defeat; the Third Reich never had time to proceed through the life cycle that the Soviet Union experienced over almost three-quarters of a century. The real exemplar of totalitarianism, and the proper benchmark for comparison and contrast, was the USSR.

I mentioned that Zaslavsky’s concept of system-maintenance, first considered under the rubric of “Soviet society,” then inserted and

⁷³ Zaslavsky, “The Katyn Massacre,” 105.

developed under the banner of “totalitarianism,” assumes some degree of consensus, acquiescence or resignation among and from the populace at large. The question Zaslavsky asked as a sociologist was one that simply did not occur to Arendt because it was entirely outside the purview of her theory and its domain assumptions: what are the social sources of totalitarianism’s cohesion, once terror is removed? What makes a “normal” Soviet society possible at all? These questions, in turn, opened an envelope of further queries that eventuated in an especially rich account of the Soviet Union under Brezhnev. Zaslavsky’s answers depart from Arendt’s theorization in a number of striking ways. Two are especially important: they bear on ideology and class formation.

Just as totalitarian society developed in two phases before its disintegration and collapse, so it also harbored two different ideological modes.⁷⁴ During the Stalinist period, communist doctrine was increasingly displaced onto and condensed in the figure of Stalin; “the infallibility of ideology”—centered in early Bolshevism on equality and internationalism—“was replaced by the infallibility of the *vozhda*” who became the sole official interpreter of the true Marxist faith.⁷⁵ By the Brezhnev imperium, however, Communist ideology in both its Leninist and Stalinist dispensations had lost much of the charisma with which it had once been invested; it now became a routinized instrument for managing opinion and negotiating the complexities of a mature society. As in Stalin’s time, the Politburo’s foremost objectives were military superiority over the United States, and the advance of industries associated with this objective. Similarly, ideology, while appearing adamant, was capable of flexible permutations where circumstances demanded, a process Zaslavsky calls “fictionalization.”⁷⁶ The term refers not to organized lying, a mainstay of communism throughout its days in power, but to the Party’s ever-greater tendency

⁷⁴ That is, the two ideological modes which are relevant for this chapter on totalitarianism. For a discussion of nationalism as an ideology, and its different forms, see Zaslavsky, “The Evolution of Separatism in Soviet Society Under Gorbachev,” 79–95.

⁷⁵ Zaslavsky, “The Problem of Legitimation in Soviet Society,” 169.

⁷⁶ Zaslavsky, *The Neo-Stalinist State*, 81.

to oscillate between an “official” and an “operative” ideological posture. The former, intended for mass consumption, and laced with venerable symbols and hallowed rituals of proletarian democracy and internationalism, trumpeted Soviet society’s seamless economic achievements, the vigilance required to check Chinese and American aggression, and the essentially harmonious nature of the USSR. Conversely, the “operative” ideology, articulated in private forums, was more frank about Soviet realities, more pragmatic about solving problems, and more open to individual needs, prejudices, and differences of opinion. The channels of this operative ideology were not ad hoc or furtive; they were thoroughly institutionalized by the Party in “closed lectures” and counterpropaganda sessions. Nor was the operative ideology entirely divorced from its official counterpart; a basic symmetry of form and a fundamental worldview was assumed to apply to both iterations. But whereas the official ideology pontificated breezily about the new Soviet Jerusalem, the operative ideology opened avenues of relatively free expression to address problems—for instance rampant, multitiered inequality—or to ventilate commitments and prejudices, including nationalism and anti-Semitism, which officially no longer existed in Soviet society. This prosaic operative ideology released pressure from a system where truth was systemically sacrificed to propaganda in official utterances. As such, it formed a stabilizing platform of what Zaslavsky calls the “organized consensus,”⁷⁷ an implicit social contract,⁷⁸ “dialectical interplay”⁷⁹ and “political compromise between the state and the people in which basic social groups accept the existing distribution of power and their estrangement from the decision-making process in exchange for job security, some workers’ rights, upward mobility, and a slow and steady rise in living standards.”⁸⁰ As the Stalin terror years receded, and as the expectations of workers for a better life mounted, so the regime’s legitimacy increasingly came to depend on

⁷⁷ V. Zaslavsky, *Il consenso organizzato: La società sovietica negli anni di Brežnev* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1981).

⁷⁸ Zaslavsky, “The Soviet Union,” 79.

⁷⁹ Zaslavsky, *The Neo-Stalinist State*, 135.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, viii.

the provision of economic benefits and social status for the populace at large; in effect, it was being asked to deliver on the Communist promise of abundance. “Total job security and price stability” became, in totalitarianism’s phase of system-maintenance, “inviolable norms” that the regime threatened to its own cost. Moreover, “having restored the right of workers to change their jobs at will, the Soviet leadership created a peculiar semi-free labor market in which job turnover, rather than higher productivity and better skills, became the major bargaining resource of industrial workers.”⁸¹ The Soviet population, Zaslavsky wryly observes,⁸² was not, not even under Stalin, “a lump of clay that yields to any pressure from above.”

Patterns of Stratification

Zaslavsky’s sociological approach to ideology—tracing its modes, mutations, relationship to everyday economic life, and its connections to the regime’s needs and the population’s demands—is a far cry from Arendt’s depiction of a frenzied, remorseless logic impermeable to facts and utterly unhinged from reality. His depiction of the fate of social classes under totalitarianism also markedly diverges from Arendt’s analysis. To grasp the dimensions and extent of this deviation we must briefly return to her theory.

Totalitarianism is only possible, Arendt claims, in those societies where classes have dissolved into masses, where party politics has been reduced to ideological posturing, and where the responsibilities of citizenship have succumbed to apathy on a large scale. “The totalitarian movements,” she says, “aim at and succeed in organizing masses—not classes.”⁸³ *Classes* are interest-bound formations, determined by their place in the productive process. They provide individuals with a sense of social membership. *Masses* are something quite different and are not to be confused with the riff-raff of bohemians, crackpots, gangsters and

⁸¹ Zaslavsky, “The Soviet Union,” 79.

⁸² Zaslavsky, *The Neo-Stalinist State*, 135.

⁸³ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 308.

conspirators Arendt dubs “the mob.” Masses come in two complementary forms. First, they draw individuals who live on the periphery of all social and political involvements. Bereft of organizational affiliation, inexperienced in conventional politics, and lacking conviction, masses call down a plague on all houses. Having never been previously organized by the party system, or ever convinced by its rhetoric, they offer virgin territory for the totalitarian movements to fertilize.

Alongside this first meaning of “masses”—a permanent fixture of modern societies, witness to the inability of class formations to incorporate many segments of the populace—Arendt introduces another. On this reckoning, masses are the product of a specific conjuncture. They constitute the detritus of all social strata that have lost their former social identity and emotional bearings as a result of abrupt political, geopolitical and economic dislocation—the same conditions that Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons said produced anomie (a term Arendt assiduously avoids). In Continental Europe, masses in this sense emerged in one of two ways. In the first manifestation they were an unintended consequence of the turmoil that followed World War I: revolution, military defeat, economic depression, break-up of empire, foundation of new ethnically based states, the resultant displacement of those now deemed aliens. This pattern was evident in many parts of central eastern and western Europe. Social calamity smashed much of the class system. In its place arrived a “new terrifying negative solidarity”—a “structureless mass of furious individuals”—comprised of unemployed workers, dispossessed small businessmen, and “former members of the middle and upper classes.”⁸⁴ Common to all was an undiluted sense of bitterness, betrayal and a loathing of status quo parties—especially those which had previously claimed to represent them.

In Germany and Austria, National Socialism took advantage of this crisis, organizing masses that had been politically disenfranchised and economically emasculated in the interwar years. The masses furnished the social basis of the Nazi dictatorship and, after 1940, the totalitarian regime. But the point is that they preceded totalitarian rule. In the lands dominated by Bolshevism, conversely, masses were principally

⁸⁴ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 315.

the artifact of a deliberate policy aimed at pulverizing all groups and factions that were independent of the state. Arendt argues that Lenin, fearful of the inchoate nature of Soviet society, deliberately sought to foster stratification by multiplying interests and identities based, for instance, on independent trade unions, councils, and nationality. Stalin reversed this process. He wished to “fabricate an atomized and structureless mass”⁸⁵ the better to dominate society as a whole. To do this he set about liquidating property owners, independent peasants, trade unions and councils, and purging the military and bureaucracy, including factory managers and engineers. All “nonpolitical communal bonds”⁸⁶ were similarly eradicated by a reign of terror that encouraged denunciation and the severance of friendship and family ties. Instead of a totalitarian movement organizing the masses, as in Germany, the totalitarian state in Russia created them.

A problematic corollary of Arendt’s theory of the masses is that, once formulated, she was then under no obligation to identify patterns of class formation and, a fortiori, to examine their political significance for Soviet life. The very concept of “social stratification,” was anathema to her way of thinking; it stank of sociology. Arendt’s substantive scholarly interest in the Soviet Union—at least if measured by her writings on it—was effectively over by the late fifties. The 1960s and 1970s (she died suddenly in December 1975) in the USSR passed largely without comment. These were the decades that Victor Zaslavsky’s *The Neo-Stalinist State* sought to illuminate, the high tide of system-maintenance. Again, his analysis is nuanced and subtle.

Striking an Arendtian chord, Zaslavsky affirms that Soviet society under Brezhnev is characterized by “social atomization,” a legacy of the Stalin period. “All social activity remains the prerogative of the neo-Stalinist state. No individual or group initiative is possible without party-state mediation.” It is not simply that the regime stamps down hard on any emergent “solidarity among individuals.”⁸⁷ It is also that the Party engages in calculated “atomization tactics”⁸⁸ designed to impede the formation of a class conscious, unified workers’ movement.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 319.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 322.

⁸⁷ Zaslavsky, *The Neo-Stalinist State*, 45.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 58.

Such statements appear to resemble Arendt's description of state directed pulverization. The rub is Zaslavsky's further contention that far from society dissolving into masses—lonely, discombobulated monads devoid of companionship outside the family—a new stratification order emerges, in part intentionally, in part unwittingly, consequent upon the state's aim to preempt resistance to its rule and run a productive economy. Indeed, on Zaslavsky's telling, the Soviet Union is far more stratified than modern Western countries. While the Soviet Union neuters the intellectuals and eliminates distinctive classes of landlords, bourgeoisie (industrial, commercial, financial), petty bourgeoisie, and proletarians, it spawns a new, segmented system of great complexity. Stratification is reconstituted, carpentered along lines of political-administrative ascription. Hence the working class exists as a plethora of occupational castes and interest groups, delineated by type of work, residence, and ethnicity. "Contrary to official rhetoric about growing social homogeneity and progress towards the final overcoming of all social differences, *intra*class differences in the Soviet Union are becoming far more substantial than *inter*class ones."⁸⁹ And these differences have gained added intensity with a momentous post-Stalin development: the right of workers to renounce their work, thereby creating shortages of labor which, in turn, inflates its and their value.

What, then, are the sources of social cleavage? Aside from the myriad gradations of privilege that attach to proximity to or distance from the nomenklatura, Zaslavsky mentions several stubbornly embedded, because state engineered, social divisions: notably, between collective farmers (*kolkhozniks*) who, as in Stalin's days, are tied to their villages, and internal passport bearers (they may well be agricultural workers) whose documents enable geographical mobility; between those condemned to economic stagnation in village farms or small and medium-sized towns, and those permitted to migrate to "closed cities" (capitals of the Soviet national republics and cities with populations over 500,000) where opportunities for better pay, housing, and status advancement are more abundant; and between those who engage in standard occupations and those employed in "closed enterprises."

⁸⁹ Ibid., 45.

The latter are an especially important locus of relative privilege. Closed enterprises are those deemed to produce a service or a material good that falls “into the very vague category of military or state secret”;⁹⁰ with the passage of time, and the inflation of this category, more and more enterprises have gathered under its umbrella to acquire the protection and standing it bestows. A stalwart pillar of system-maintenance, closed enterprises offer to their workers comparably higher wages, better fringe benefits, and the personal satisfaction that accompanies social respect. The compromises required from them are greater work discipline than workers in standard or open enterprises and the renunciation of collective action and of rights to quit the job without good cause. Regime indoctrination is intense in these enterprises, support for the regime enthusiastic, political opinion, generally conservative.⁹¹ Employees of closed enterprises subject themselves to “voluntary atomization”⁹² as each privilege they gain cuts them off from other groups and subjects them to ever more sequestered control and subservience.⁹³ “Skilled workers, engineers, and technical specialists [of the military sector] who might have fallen in with a reform movement [are] instead thoroughly co-opted by the system.”⁹⁴ It transpires that economic classes are not so much destroyed, as redivided. Predictably, overlap between and among advantaged status groups is common. Hence the majority of specialists—those with valued skills—work in closed enterprises, reside in closed cities that in turn harbor the major universities.⁹⁵

The costs of this arrangement to economic efficiency, to demographic balance, and to social adjustment are extensively documented

⁹⁰ Ibid., 33.

⁹¹ As evidenced by their strong support for the invasion of Czechoslovakia, contrasted to employees of open enterprises. See the figures in Zaslavsky's informal sociological survey, presented in *The Neo-Stalinist State*, 35. For his account of the Italian Communist Party (PCI)'s response to the Prague Spring, see V. Zaslavsky, “The Prague Spring: Resistance and Surrender of the PCI,” in *Promises of 1968: Crisis, Illusion, and Utopia*, ed. V. Tismaneanu (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011), 388–406.

⁹² Zaslavsky, *The Neo-Stalinist State*, 63.

⁹³ Ibid., 58–59.

⁹⁴ Zaslavsky, “The Soviet Union,” 80.

⁹⁵ Zaslavsky, *The Neo-Stalinist State*, 75.

by Zaslavsky; together with the structural distortions that a military-industrial economy produced for the regime, they led to a process of stagnation and “counter-modernization” that eventuated in its collapse. And the shape that the collapse took—the breakup of the Soviet Union into fifteen different countries—further reflected its stratification order. Among the most acute and prescient aspects of Zaslavsky’s analysis is his depiction of ethnic, proto-national stratification throughout the Soviet Union’s republics, an institutional isomorphism, which reproduced the Russian model in microscopic detail: all republics obtained almost identical research and development establishments, including academies of science, state publishing houses, and unions of writers, artists, architects, and so forth.⁹⁶ “On the group level, major ethnic groups were assigned their officially recognized territories and organized into an elaborate administrative hierarchy of ethnic stratification, in which the fifteen Soviet republics represented the highest rank of statehood accessible to a Soviet nationality. Individually, the ethnic affiliation of all citizens was registered on their internal passport and treated as the person’s ascriptive characteristic inherited at birth. The registration of nationality in passports both served as a determinant of individual identity and established rigid boundaries between nationalities.”⁹⁷ At the apex of each republic was an ethnic elite and educated middle class assigned preferential treatment by the Center and, until the end, loyal to it.⁹⁸ When the Soviet Union unraveled, it did so on the lines that the Communist Party had itself so assiduously established.

⁹⁶ V. Zaslavsky, “Nationalism and Democratic Transition in Postcommunist Societies,” *Daedalus* 121 (1992): 102.

⁹⁷ Zaslavsky, “The Soviet Union,” 86.

⁹⁸ Zaslavsky, “Nationalism and Democratic Transition in Postcommunist Societies,” 102–3. The extensive redistributive policy of the Center and its protection and promotion of elite ethnic interests, political and occupational, is described at length in Zaslavsky, “Nationalism and Democratic Transition in Postcommunist Societies.” The reason why republics of Soviet Central Asia were the last to split from the crumbling Soviet Union was that their elites were the most integrated into this overarching system, accrued large benefits from it, and appreciated what the loss of their state-dependence would mean in terms of security, remuneration, and cultural production (Zaslavsky, “Nationalism and Democratic Transition in Postcommunist Societies,” 108). See also Zubok, “In Memoriam,” 536.

Conclusion

A perusal of Victor Zaslavsky's bibliography shows that his studies of the Soviet Union passed through three discernible phases; although none are severed from the others, each possesses a unique emphasis. The writings collected in *The Neo-Stalinist State* (1982) are primarily devoted to the USSR during the Brezhnev era, a time of uneasy consolidation or "system-maintenance." The days of mass terror and ideological fervor were over. Soviet society was undergoing the steady routinization of the founders' charisma. A kind of quotidian normality existed. But having described this society and Gorbachev's reforms in detail, and then, in a brief second phase, having explained how it could unwind so quickly along ethnic and national lines),⁹⁹ Zaslavsky made a sharp about-face and returned to the time that Arendt made her specialty: the age of Hitler and Stalin's preeminence.¹⁰⁰ It was not her work that persuaded him to reconsider the concept of totalitarianism. It was new information available in recently opened official archives, coupled to his own scholarly reorientation to the Soviet Union's most sanguinary period. "For the first time," he remarked, "comprehensive data concerning the functioning of [the Soviet Union's] coercive apparatus, the scope of terror and deportations, and, perhaps most important, the true extent of the militarization of [the] Soviet economy and society is available."¹⁰¹ It says much about Victor Zaslavsky's intellectual honesty and wide and deep knowledge of the Soviet Union that he felt compelled to reevaluate his qualms about totalitarianism when new facts called on him to do so.

⁹⁹ Notably Zaslavsky, "The Soviet Union"; Zaslavsky, "Nationalism and Democratic Transition in Postcommunist Societies"; and Zaslavsky, "The Evolution of Separatism in Soviet Society under Gorbachev."

¹⁰⁰ During what I am calling the second and third phases, Zaslavsky was working simultaneously, with his wife and collaborator Elena Aga-Rossi, on the relationship between Stalin's ascendancy and the Italian Communist Party under Togliatti. Yet this again focused mainly on the period of classic Soviet totalitarianism rather than on its "normalization" under Brezhnev.

¹⁰¹ Zaslavsky, "The Katyn Massacre," 67.

European Liberalism in the Age of Totalitarianisms

GIOVANNI ORSINA

This chapter presents some reflections on the fate that awaited the “liberal project” in twentieth-century Europe. Consequently, it addresses how that project’s tormented and incomplete realization mirrored fascist and communist alternatives. Because liberalism is viewed as a key player in the political conflict that marked the era of tyrannies, as the other side of the totalitarian coin, it is considered mainly from three perspectives. First, it is seen as an ambivalent ideology, which is not only static and “methodological” (a series of procedures and institutions allowing the peaceful coexistence of different values), but also dynamic and “substantial.” In other words, it is seen as being able to provide, within precise limits, a reassuring and convincing answer to the dramatic acceleration of the historical changes determined by modernity, and to the radical challenge posed by utopian and revolutionary thought and praxis. Second, it is seen as an ideology made historically (not theoretically) fragile by its complex internal articulation of method and substance, which subordinates its fulfillment to a virtuous circle that can start and function only in the presence of well-defined, rare historical conditions. Third, it is seen as an ideology that, once again because of its two-faced nature, can establish both an institutional system and a political party active within that system.

After additional remarks on the dynamic and substantial component of the liberal ideology, the article moves on to consider—inspired primarily by two “classics,” Ludwig von Mises’s *Omnipotent Government* and Karl Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation*—the crisis of the liberal project in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the ensuing rise of totalitarianism. I mostly interpret these phenomena

as resulting from liberalism's failure to manage the pace of historical change and the expectations engendered by that change. In conclusion, I turn to the post–World War II years, analyzing them particularly from the point of view of liberal internationalism, and focusing on the forms and reasons of the postwar crisis of party liberalism. The latter can provide original information on the liberal project in general and on its historical fate.

Liberal Ideology

What liberalism is has long constituted a notoriously complex matter. This is certainly not the place to address the issue at length, or in a systematic way. The line of reasoning I develop follows a rather specific notion of liberalism. Admittedly, my definition intends to offer a limited perspective on the historical events under investigation, not a “closed” and definitive solution to them. Liberalism is viewed here as a comprehensive and coherent project for the overcoming of the social, economic, political, and cultural problems posed by modernity. At its core, the project is based on the conviction, first, that establishing free and spontaneous interaction among human beings is possible within a well thought-out framework of rules and institutions, and, second, that interaction structured in this way is able to generate progress at all levels.

Unlike other definitions, the one provided above does not reduce liberalism to its methodological and institutional component, which would essentially equate it with constitutionalism, or to its economic one.¹ While my definition does not deny that constitutional and economic matters are fundamental for liberalism—or rule out that one or the other have taken precedence from time to time—what it highlights is liberalism's ability to say something substantial about the quality of

¹ On the institutional component of liberalism, see in N. Roussellier, *L'Europe des Libéraux* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1991). On the economic component, see K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, [1944] 2001).

historical change, and to keep all spheres of human activity united in a single design. If you will, it highlights liberalism's intent not only to solve the economic, social, and institutional problems posed by the crisis created by the old regime, but also to supply a strong answer to the revolutionary challenge, and to the latter's aim to rebuild the social order from its foundations following a rational and perfect plan, by proposing an alternative way—a more human, more secure, and less painful route—to the gradual but limitless improvement of humankind.

When observed from this perspective, the liberal project appears progressive, utopian, pedagogical, unitary, and universalistic. It is progressive because it offers a recipe not for conservation, but for social transformation, which moves in an undeniably benign direction on both the material and moral planes.² It is utopian because—while it does not presume to be able to predict the ways in which humankind will develop, and while it firmly rejects the notion that such a development might come to and end in a state of permanence and perfection—it is not lacking a philosophy of history, and an optimistic philosophy at that. It contemplates an ideal condition toward which humankind can and must advance. In this condition, all human interaction at every level (economic, cultural, social, in relation to domestic and international politics, and so forth), is—and, more important, is considered by those who take part in it—a positive-sum game. In a profound and noble sense, it is a world that draws inspiration from the free trade paradigm, made up of individuals persuaded that social interest and personal interest coincide, thus naturally inclined to cooperate and not to clash. It is a world, therefore, in which coercion and power may be minimized, or rather in which they are destined to decrease over time.

Liberalism has pedagogical aspirations, too. Historical progress and the gradual advancement toward the “utopia of the positive-sum

² Several documents issued by Liberal International could be cited on the progressive nature of liberalism. For example, see “The Liberal Initiative in the World of Today and Tomorrow,” a report approved by LI's tenth congress (Brussels, 1961) later published in pamphlet form, according to which liberalism appeals to an “evolutionary imperative aiming at an open and free society, capable of continuously restoring its balance by its own virtue, based on the harmony between order, individual liberty and a sense of responsibility” (11–12). For theoretical references, see footnote 6.

game” move from the assumption, and produce as a consequence, that people are not too distant from a certain anthropological type—and that they get increasingly closer to it in time. This anthropological type is not founded on a strong, univocal, and all-pervasive worldview, or notion of right and wrong. Nor is it founded on a rationalistic and dogmatic model for the reconstruction of the political order, aimed at attaining a state of perfection postulated a priori. Nevertheless, it is at least based on a minimal set of conditions that not only allow human interaction, but also ensure that it is peaceful and fruitful: tolerance, reasonableness, consciousness of and confidence in perfectibility, appreciation of individual autonomy, sociability, and willingness to cooperate. In brief, this anthropological type is based on the conviction that interaction among individuals is a positive-sum game, and that peaceful cooperation is always more profitable than conflict.³ Further, the liberal project is unitary because the positive-sum game paradigm, as stated above, applies to every field of human activity—to economy as well as to politics, and to the social sphere as well as to the cultural one. Finally, liberalism has planetary ambitions. At least in its abstract form, it aspires to extend its range of action to all humanity. At the same time, the liberal model of international relations requires that all the main actors accept the rules of compromise and peaceful interaction that result from the awareness of being involved in a positive-sum game.

³ Whether or not the liberal method requires an ethical core is a notoriously controversial matter, which political philosophers have long tackled, in the last few decades often basing their works on J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). I have no intention of entering this debate, for which I am unprepared. I am not interested in the moral foundations of liberalism, but in its historical foundations—in the fact that, empirically, liberal society can function well only if individuals of a certain anthropological type prevail, that there has to be a virtuous circle between the liberal development of society and that of individuals, and that this virtuous circle can only be set in motion once a minimum of civilization has been reached. That the fundamental character of this anthropological type consists in the faith in a core of values, or in the acceptance of a method, or in the attainment of a minimum of rationality, is not immediately relevant to my purposes.

The Crisis of the Liberal Project

In my opinion, the historical fate of liberalism, as defined above, offers a fertile perspective on Europe's vicissitudes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (in many ways, it offers a perspective extending beyond the confines of Europe, and beyond the twentieth century into the twenty-first). It is not the only possible perspective, or necessarily the best one. But it isn't the least interesting one, either. Thus, the liberal project may be considered the "hegemonic solution"⁴ to the macroscopic problems that arose in the second half of the eighteenth century, which, for the sake of brevity, we may group under the label of "modernity." The last two centuries may be read as the period in which, following a long and rough road, that project gradually came to fruition. Seen from this vantage point, alternatives to liberalism, particularly totalitarian ones, primarily show their "reactive" side: their reaction to the contradictions within the hegemonic project; their reaction to liberalism's inability to solve problems, and especially to solve them quickly; their reaction to liberalism's tendency to create new problems, or to exacerbate old ones; their occupying the historical and political spaces left empty by liberalism in its times of crisis and retreat. That is not to say that their solutions are exclusively reactive, or that their reactive nature makes them identical to one another—only that the liberal perspective may be a fruitful if partial one from which to observe them.

The liberal project is certainly powerful, but it is also fragile. It appears that a large part of its fragility resides in the difficulties that emerge any time an attempt is made to translate into concrete historical form the theoretical balance between methodology and substance that exists within liberalism. Liberalism is methodological in nature because it is primarily interested in the forms and modes of interaction

⁴ Liberalism's hegemonic position in postwar Europe has been prominently addressed from a strictly ideological point of view by two very different scholars, Michael Freeden and John Gray: see M. Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), particularly part II, eloquently titled "Liberalism: The Dominant Ideology"; and J. Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London: Routledge, 1995).

between individuals, yet it refuses to dictate the contents and direction of this interaction, leaving it up to each person to determine independently the ones and the other. Liberalism, however, cannot be reduced exclusively to methodology, for it makes at least two forays into the land of substance—one of them historically “upstream” and the other historically “downstream” of the method’s application. Upstream, where it takes note that liberal methodology can be applied only in the presence of certain historical conditions, that is, where it takes note that free, peaceful, orderly, and progressive human interaction—a positive-sum game—is possible only when individuals have reached a certain level of maturity.⁵ Downstream, where, even though it declares itself incapable of predicting what free human interaction will produce, it affirms the latter’s progressive nature, to the point of becoming utopian—while there is no knowing what tomorrow will bring, it will surely be a brighter day for us, which will bring us one step closer to (an unreachable and unknowable) perfection.⁶

It is around these two substantial aspects that the most complex historical problems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries coalesced. But liberalism cannot disregard them even in its methodological form.

The first of those historical problems—and a visible one, and hard to tackle—stems from the contradiction between, on the one hand, the awareness that positive-sum games can only take place once a certain level of development has been achieved, and, on the other hand, the universalistic and expansionist tendencies of the liberal project. In 1853, Charles de Rémusat pointed out what he saw as a paradox in Edmund

⁵ For example, see J.S. Mill, *On Liberty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 81. “Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion. Until then, there is nothing for them but implicit obedience to an Akbar or a Charlemagne, if they are so fortunate as to find one.”

⁶ For example, see *ibid.* See also L. Von Mises, *Omnipotent Government: The Rise of the Total State and Total War* (Indianapolis: Liberty fund, [1944] 2011); F.A. Hayek, “Why I Am Not a Conservative,” in *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 397–411, and F. A. Hayek, *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 147–49; G. De Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1925] 1927), who sets off in his analysis from a very different philosophical basis.

Burke's political thought: "If in order to be free one must have already been so, if to attain a good government one must have already had one . . . the circumstances of peoples are rendered immobile by their antecedents, their future is fated, and there are desperate nations."⁷ Burke famously did not cross the line that would have transformed him from a Whig to a Liberal. He did not get to see the historical legacy of political values that emerged from the "seismic rift" of seventeenth-century England as universal. The paradox decried by Rémusat therefore fully applied to his case.⁸ Conversely, liberals, precisely because they were persuaded of their creed's potentially universal nature, believed that carrying out a liberalization process in "desperate nations" was not impossible. Better still, they did not believe that such a thing as a "desperate nation" truly existed. Yet the paradox in attenuated form applied to them, too, for the virtuous circle of liberalism could not be set in motion below a certain threshold of "civilization." On the one hand, this statement of fact posed the problem of what ought to be done in the case of those countries that were yet to reach that threshold, and of the extent to which the contradiction of resorting to more or less authoritarian means to bring such countries "up to speed" in the name of liberty might be tolerable.⁹ On the other hand, it revived the interpretation according to which the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century crisis of the liberal project should also be ascribed to its expanding ultra vires—that is, to the fact that the liberal project was prompted by its universalism to expand into countries that were still unprepared or unwilling to welcome it.¹⁰

⁷ Cited in L. Compagna and E. Cuomo, eds., *La democrazia dei liberali* (Turin: Giappichelli, 2000), XVI–XVII n.

⁸ On universalism as an element separating Whigs from Liberals, see "The Influence of America," in Lord Acton, *Lectures on the French Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1910), 20–38.

⁹ On these issues as applied to Italy, see R. Romanelli, *Il comando impossibile: Stato e società nell'Italia liberale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988).

¹⁰ For Italy's case, see note 9. With regard to Germany's "rebellion" to the "civilization" project as conceived in the West—a project that does not entirely overlap with the liberal one, but which cannot be said to be entirely alien from it either—Thomas Mann's *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man* (1918) is a classic. See also M. Knox, *To the Threshold of Power, 1922–1933: Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and National Socialist Dictatorships*

The second historical problem was engendered by the liberal promise of progress. Or rather, it was created by the fact that it was indeed a promise, not a certainty—a hypothesis the validity of which could be verified a posteriori, or predicted extrapolating from past experiences (if an adequate number of observations was available), but could only be taken for granted as an act of faith a priori. In *Darkness at Noon*, allegedly reproducing an extract from the diary of the unlucky protagonist Nicholas Rubashov, Arthur Koestler skillfully describes the final character of the revolutionary choice:

The ultimate truth is penultimately always a falsehood. He who will be proved right in the end appears to be wrong and harmful before it. But who will be proved right? It will only be known later. Meanwhile he is bound to act on credit and to sell his soul to the devil, in the hope of history's absolution. . . . Proof disproved proof, and finally we had to recur to faith—to axiomatic faith in the rightness of one's own reasoning. That is the crucial point. We have thrown all ballast overboard; only one anchor holds us: faith in one's self. Geometry is the purest realization of human reason; but Euclid's axioms cannot be proved. He who does not believe in them sees the whole building crash. No. I has faith in himself, tough, slow, sullen and unshakable. He has the most solid anchor-chain of all. Mine has worn thin in the last few years . . . The fact is: I no longer believe in my infallibility. That is why I am lost.¹¹

This quote can certainly be used to differentiate the liberal solution from totalitarian ones. Liberalism rejects the idea that anything ultimate exists. Thus, it cannot sacrifice anything penultimate in its name. Instead, it views history as an endless succession of occurrences susceptible to cautious and pragmatic corrections by way of trial and error. The quote, however, could also be used to illustrate that liberalism does,

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Countless volumes have been written on how the Western values of self-determination and emancipation took on an ethno-nationalistic form in Eastern Europe, which was entirely incompatible with the liberal utopia of the positive-sum game. Just as an example, see Von Mises, *Omnipotent State*, 60–65; D. Diner, *Cataclysms: a History of the Twentieth Century from Europe's Edge* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), particularly ch. 1; E. Halévy, *The Era of Tyrannies: Essays on Socialism and War* (London: Penguin Press, [1929] 1967), 161–90.

¹¹ A. Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940), 99 and 101.

after all, have something in common with its worst enemies. Liberals too have been affected by an a priori faith in themselves and in their own political convictions. What liberals were aiming to safeguard, though, and it's no small difference, was not faith in the ultimate goal toward which history was running, but faith in a method that kept, and would forever keep, history in a state of progressive movement. In the nineteenth century, when historical experience on how to handle modernity was still very limited, liberalism made a promise of progress through freedom as exciting as it was demanding. As long as it was able to keep this promise, or to appear to be keeping this promise, liberalism was given credit. But how long could it continue to receive credit once freedom started generating stagnation or regression, whether in reality or in common perception? How long could people resist those who argued that the liberal method was actually leading to catastrophe, and that it was time to place history in the hands of someone who had a clear understanding of where to take it?

To ask these questions is to underline how important the pace of historical development is for the fate of the liberal project. It shows that the management of time, in practice if not in theory, is in many ways the crucial problem of liberalism. Lord Acton pointed out as much in his day: "Time is needed to overcome friction and to establish a delicate balance. Therefore it is wanted for liberty, not for absolutism. It is the natural cry of Liberalism."¹² The opposing arguments presented in Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* and Ludwig von Mises's *Omnipotent Government*, both of which were published in 1944 and had a profound impact on the public and scholarly debate in the twentieth century, largely revolve around the relationship between the liberal project's short and long terms. Their reasoning is mostly concerned with the economy, but it could easily be extended to other fields of human enterprise.

Polanyi believes the liberal project is made impossible by the tremendous amount of human suffering it causes in the short term, regardless of its outcome over the course of a longer period. Politics is

¹² G. Watson, ed., *Lord Acton's History of Liberty. A Study of His Library, with an Edited Text of his History of Liberty Notes* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1994), 56.

called upon to deal with short-term suffering, not to take a long-term perspective. What's more, it is called upon to address this suffering whether it wants to or not, and even if its theoretical background would prompt it to defend the "invisible hand." Polanyi even comes up with the famous formula according to which laissez-faire is programmed, while government's involvement in the economy is not planned, but merely a pragmatic answer to the collateral damage caused by the market.

Conversely, although Mises objects to the ingenuous optimism of nineteenth-century liberalism, he fails to abandon the utopian and progressive nature of the liberal project in any way. In his view, to hamper the functioning of the capitalist method in the name of short-term concerns—thus preventing the fulfillment of its huge potential—is to carry out an ill-advised and self-damaging operation. It is no accident that he explicitly stigmatizes Keynes's famous phrase, "in the long run, we are all dead," deeming it a pernicious justification of political nearsightedness.¹³

By emphasizing that human needs must be fulfilled here and now, and by noting that societies tend to generate defense mechanisms against the market's short-term impact, Polanyi draws attention to a very serious weakness that is in fact present in the liberal project. His remarks hold true in spite of the fact that the most radical part of his reasoning, the one regarding the structural impracticability of the liberal project, has largely been disproved by the historical phase that started after the end of World War II (a year after *The Great Transformation* came out).¹⁴ They hold true despite the fact that the economic and political model he proposes, rather succinctly, as an alternative does not appear to be free of the contradictions and idealism ascribed to liberalism.¹⁵ An issue Mises raises in his own line of thinking, where he inquires into the causes for the failure of nineteenth-century

¹³ Von Mises, *Omnipotent Government*, 282.

¹⁴ On the "return" of the liberal project after 1945, cf. J.G. Ruggie, "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order," *International Organization* 36 (1982): 379–415. I will address Ruggie's concept of embedded liberalism further ahead in this essay.

¹⁵ See chapter 21 of Polanyi's *The Great Transformation*, "Freedom in a Complex Society," 257–68.

liberalism, matches the acumen of Polanyi's critical remarks. While proudly standing behind his own reasons, the great Austrian economist also expresses frustration for the lack of understanding of the world not uncommon among liberals, and identifies one of the main causes for liberalism's failure in something we might call, in very broad terms, "immaturity." He decries Germany's immaturity in particular, and the immaturity of humans in general: "Liberalism is impracticable because most people are still too unenlightened to grasp its meaning. There was a psychological error in the reasoning of the old liberals. They overrated both the intellectual capacity of the average man and the ability of the elite to convert their less judicious fellow citizens to sound ideas."¹⁶

In other words, Ludwig von Mises links the necessary historical conditions for success placed "upstream" of the liberal project with the ones placed "downstream" of it. People's maturity is in their being certain of the progressive nature of liberalism, and in their ability—which naturally follows from this certainty—to endure any short-term difficulty while seeing the results to be attained over the long term. Having identified the problem, the Austrian economist fails to suggest a possible solution (that is, he fails to address how people's ignorance may be remedied). Thus, by a different route, he unwittingly reaches the same conclusion Polanyi pursued knowingly—that is, that liberalism is impossible. Mises refuses to consider that departures from liberalism, as long as they are kept within certain limits (and this is a decisive proviso), may not destroy it, but actually strengthen it, precisely by remedying society's insufficient civilization. He refuses to consider that they might prevent the negative repercussions engendered by the liberal project over the short term from resulting in its being abandoned by those who are not "mature" enough to be patient with a view to its progressive long-term effects. Particularly outside its historical Anglo-Saxon hotbed, the realization of that project actually appears to be the result of an extremely complex and delicate virtuous circle. The latter entails a balance between long-term promises and short-term gains, and between the respect for liberty and the need to reach a certain level of civilization in order to ensure the full and progressive

¹⁶ Von Mises, *Omnipotent Government*, 317.

enjoyment of that liberty. Historically, liberal groups and politicians have aimed at setting this virtuous circle in motion with pragmatism, accepting (supposedly) temporary government intervention with which to overcome the more serious obstacles placed on the path to liberal utopia: all manners of nation- or state-building operations, a certain measure of protectionism, more or less developed elements of the welfare state, and so forth.

If the liberal project's success is dependent on a fragile balance between freedom, civilization, confidence, and the rhythm and quality of historical change, then it is apparent that its crisis in the late nineteenth century was closely intertwined with the well-known transformations in the European cultural climate of the time, especially with those affecting progressive optimism. After characterizing much of the century, the latter was now troubled and wilted.¹⁷ It is quite likely that—as maintained by Ludwig von Mises, and even more so by Wilhelm Röpke—the facile optimism of the nineteenth century was an element of weakness for liberalism. Conviction in its own inevitable triumph coaxed liberalism into a state of passivity and cowardice. It is also undeniable, however, that faith in the “magnificent and progressive fate” of humankind, as well as in the fact that the latter would fulfill itself with no need for deliberate human intervention, buttressed the liberal virtuous circle. It contributed to characterize interaction among individuals as a positive-sum game, and to make short-term problems more tolerable by pointing to exciting results in the long term. Regarding England's “long nineteenth century,” Michael Freeden wrote: “Liberalism became a dominant, even if not exclusive, ideology that could preach the virtues of openness and tolerance, precisely because it thrived in a sanguine world whose settledness was not endangered by such virtues. Nineteenth-century liberalism was a creed nourished by the certain belief in orderly progress.”¹⁸

¹⁷ See G. Sasso, *Tramonto di un mito: L'idea di “progresso” fra Ottocento e Novecento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1984); L. Mangoni, *Una crisi di fine secolo: La cultura italiana e la Francia fra Otto e Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985).

¹⁸ M. Freeden, *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought, 1914–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 9.

I believe that a more accurate reconstruction of the causal chain of events would be greatly beneficial to this discussion. What I think needs to be determined is the extent to which the decline of the idea of progress ought to be viewed as an independent and exogenous variable (as a “moral crisis” resulting from dynamics internal to the intellectual life of late nineteenth-century Europe), capable of negatively influencing the realization of the liberal project, or as a consequence of the internal contradictions of liberalism illustrated in the previous pages.

Is the “opening up” of human history, which is granted by modernity, conducive to new and extraordinary opportunities for human development, or to the mortal danger of falling back into barbarism? Building on what we have argued to far, we can claim that the way this question is answered is one of the crucial factors determining whether individuals and societies will choose a liberal or a totalitarian solution. With this question in mind, for all the reasons given above, the liberal project seems in equal parts powerful and historically fragile. The failed relationship between liberal methodology and the “controlled administration” of change was mirrored in reverse by the successful relationship between the “controlled administration” of change and the totalitarian substance. For all the differences between them, totalitarian solutions found space in which to thrive when an exceedingly “open” and fast-moving history stopped seeming like an opportunity and started to be perceived as a threat, when social and national contrasts were exacerbated, and when the optimistic, patient, relativistic and individualistic recipe for *laissez-faire* (at every level) was outweighed by calls for security. What totalitarianism offered were leadership, the straightforward separation of right and wrong, protection from real, potential or perceived dangers, and the construction of a (socially or ethnically) homogeneous and unanimous collective subject able to face history’s challenges.¹⁹ Mises illustrates how the competition between the liberal solution and the Nazi solution overlaps with the one

¹⁹ Regarding the crisis of progressivism and collective revolutionary action as an instrument for the management of a historical process viewed as “open” and menacing, see D.D. Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth-Century Europe: Understanding the Poverty of Great Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), particularly ch. 2.

between faith in positive-sum games and the belief that only zero-sum games hold any real value. Further, he underscores how coherent and persuasive Nazism is, once the second path is chosen. And of course that path would be chosen by anyone with an unshakeable belief in an ultimate truth, like Koestler's No. 1, or his historical alter ego, Joseph Stalin, as described by Milovan Djilas:

Thanks to both ideology and methods, personal experience and historical heritage, he regarded as sure only whatever he held in his fist, and everyone beyond the control of his police was a potential enemy [...]. The world in which the Soviet leaders lived—and that was my world too—was slowly taking on a new appearance to me: horrible unceasing struggle on all sides. Everything was being stripped bare and reduced to strife which changed only in form and in which only the stronger and the more adroit survived. Full of admiration for the Soviet leaders even before this, I now succumbed to a heady enthusiasm for the inexhaustible will and awareness which never left them for a moment. That was a world in which there was no choice other than victory or death. That was Stalin—the builder of a new social system.²⁰

So far I have identified some of the main contradictions within the liberal project, and illustrated how complex and delicate its realization has been, particularly outside the Anglo-Saxon world. My examination has no pretensions of being comprehensive, nor could it possibly address the whole historiographical question of the crisis of liberalism and its relationship with totalitarianisms. Further, even though his observation is all but innocent, there is probably some truth in what Mises remarks specifically with regard to German liberalism—that is, that part of the answer to why the optimism of positive-sum games was at one point displaced by the pessimism of zero-sum games lies beyond the final and unsurpassable link in the chain of historiographical explanation.²¹

²⁰ M. Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1962), 82 and 83.

²¹ Von Mises, *Omnipotent Government*, 260–61. His observation is not innocent because it takes attention away from the weaknesses inherent in the liberal project: one doesn't know whose fault it is, but it isn't liberalism's.

The crisis of liberal Europe and totalitarian alternatives, whether class-driven or nationalistic, were certainly present before the Great War. But the war amplified the range of that crisis and the strength of those alternatives to excess, turning what had only been a possibility—and might indefinitely have continued to be just that—into reality.²² In the dramatic days of the summer of 1914, the liberal hope for a broad European community founded on multilateralism and on mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of all disputes failed permanently. And because of the coherence of the liberal project, which we've already insisted on, this failure was doomed to reverberate through time and to affect not only the international arena but also the political set-up of individual countries—particularly, but not exclusively, belligerent ones. Finally, the great crisis of 1929 took it upon itself to pronounce liberalism defeated on the economic ground, too. Despite the painful attempts made throughout the 1920s to restore it, liberal economy proved incapable of surviving the collapse of the overall project to which it belonged and which accompanied it.²³

In its progressive and utopian aspect (that is, in its capacity as a great promise of gradual, but certain and limitless, moral and material improvement of individuals and society), liberalism did not recover from the blow it was dealt by the Great War. Straining the interpretation somewhat, but not a lot, we might say that June 28, 1914 was liberalism's last day as a political project, in the same way that November 9, 1989 was socialism's last day. Every liberal party in Europe took a beating in the elections after World War I.²⁴ The fatal crisis of credibility that swept the liberal project away as a strategy for

²² S. Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography* (New York: Viking Press, 1943) shows that the ideological toxins of the interwar years were present in Europe before 1914, as well as pointing out the discontinuity produced by the Great War. The emphasis Zweig places on the crisis of social stability and predictability engendered by the conflict is especially meaningful in relation to my argument about liberalism.

²³ Cf. C.S. Maier, "The Two Postwar Eras and the Conditions for Stability in Twentieth-Century Western Europe," *American Historical Review* 86 (1981): 327–52.

²⁴ Cf. essays on individual cases published in P. Delwit, ed., *Libéralisme et parties libérales en Europe* (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2002), and in E.J. Kirchner, ed., *Liberal Parties in Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

the “controlled administration” of the historical change leading into modernity, however, did not display the same features in all places. Particularly, not everywhere did this crisis cause the destruction of the liberal methodology for conflict resolution, to wit the principles of constitutionalism. In countries where the virtuous circle of liberal civilization had had time to consolidate and gain legitimacy, at least the institutional “core” was able to endure through the dissolution of the utopian “flesh” that had covered it until then. Conversely, in countries where progressive optimism was a necessary ingredient for the survival of a still young and precarious liberalism, the conflict disintegrated at once its ideology, its political forces, and its institutions. Only starting from this statement of fact is it possible to contrast and compare what happened to the various European political systems—to the Italian one and to the British one, for instance—in the course of the postwar years. Throughout the whole continent, the hegemonic solution to modernity’s problems faced an irreparable historical crisis. Nevertheless, each country reacted differently based on the project’s state of advancement, and, thus, based on the amount of dry residue left after it evaporated. In Italy—where work to implement the project was set in motion rather late, after it had already started showing signs of deterioration—substantial and methodological liberalism collapsed jointly. In Great Britain, liberalism’s cradle, the one outlived the other.

Post—World War II Years

Following World War I, totalitarian experiments filled the space emptied by the crisis of the liberal project. Similarly, after 1945, liberalism resurfaced and filled the void left behind by the failure of radical nationalism. The “return” of the liberal project to Europe took place, in large part, for lack of better alternatives, as totalitarianism was either defeated at great cost, as in the case of fascism, or rejected by the majority of European public opinion, as in the case of communism. Of course, the United States’ decision to take on the role of hegemonic power—setting the virtuous circle of liberal civilization in motion again by way of its political, economic, and military strength—also played

a decisive role. Thus, in the wake of World War II, strong American encouragement, the disappearance of the radical nationalist option, and voters' ongoing rejection of communism once again opened up a space for European liberalism. Yet nothing could be as it had been. The events of the late nineteenth century and of the first half of the twentieth century had made deep and lasting marks on history, decisively affecting the ways in which the liberal project was resumed. Or rather, they had made marks that prevented the project's old, nineteenth-century spirit—the optimistic promise of spontaneous, guaranteed, and boundless progress—to be revived with its institutional (political and economic) mechanisms.

The historiographic formula that best captures the limits of the liberal project's postwar revival is the one proposed some thirty years ago by John Gerard Ruggie.²⁵ His "embedded liberalism" is liberal for it undoubtedly aims to create a more and more internationally integrated market economy. Yet it is also embedded for it takes into account the serious and potentially fatal backlashes that kind of economic system can produce in political and social terms. It therefore advances in a gradual and cautious manner; it does not place excessive confidence in the "invisible hand"; it has no qualms about governing transformations; it strives to balance long-term needs against short- and medium-term ones. It attempts to recover the substance of the liberal project, while also trying to avoid the mistakes that wrecked it in the first half of the twentieth century. In Ruggie's definition, "embedded liberalism" primarily affects economy, and is especially concerned with the difficult relationship between international trade integration and national economies. The notion, however, may be not only extended in several other directions, but also used to reread the "internal history" of European postwar liberalism—an operation to which historiography has not devoted a lot of energy, particularly in comparative rather than national terms, and from the vantage point of political history rather than from that of the history of ideas.

Obviously, many liberals were aware of how fragile, conditional, and related to the state of affairs at hand liberalism's return to Europe

²⁵ Ruggie, "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change."

was after 1945. One of the founders of Liberal International, as well as its first historian, John MacCallum Scott, summarized thus the speech Roger Motz gave in 1946 to inaugurate the celebrations for the one-hundredth anniversary of the Belgian liberal party: “Liberalism was being forced on governments by events. ‘Nous sommes condamnés à la liberté.’ Conservatives were being driven into adopting liberal economics, socialists into adopting liberal social policies. But in both cases it was liberalism without liberals, accepted under pressure with minimal grace and applied to a minimal degree. This, he concluded, was the identical problem that faced the liberals of every country, and the reason why the meeting had been convened.”²⁶

Pondering the catastrophe sustained by the liberal project between the end of the nineteenth century and the first few decades of the twentieth century, and reflecting on how to avoid its recurrence, were the orders of the day in the 1930s and 1940s for the cultural circles and political forces that drew inspiration from it. Influential scholars like Röpke and Einaudi chose to emphasize that a competitive market economy was not an inevitable and “natural” end, but rather the result of a precise institutional set-up, the creation and maintenance of which depended on conscious human intervention.²⁷ As already indicated, Ludwig von Mises takes an even more “classic” approach to economic issues, but does address the matter of actively defending the liberal project in the sphere of international relations.²⁸

In still other cases, rather than or in addition to having to do with the economy or with international relations, awareness of the need to defend liberalism focused on political institutions. The need for an “armed liberalism” able to safeguard the survival of the mechanism of

²⁶ J.H. MacCallum Scott, *Experiment in Internationalism: A Study in International Politics* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), 21.

²⁷ Cf. A. Giordano, *Il pensiero politico di Luigi Einaudi* (Genoa: Name, 2006); G. Nicolosi, “Il nuovo liberalismo,” in *I liberali italiani dall'antifascismo alla repubblica*, ed. F. Grassi Orsini and G. Nicolosi, vol. 1 (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2008), 243–84; W. Röpke, *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1942] 1950).

²⁸ Von Mises, *Omnipotent Government*, 10–11.

tolerance against the offensives of the intolerant was emphasized.²⁹ Last but not least, as is well known, postwar liberals very often identified in the welfare system the main political mechanism capable of balancing out the market's automatisms.

After the catastrophes of 1914–45, liberalism tried to distance itself from the optimistic, nineteenth-century confidence in the necessary link between freedom and progress, further engaging in robust self-criticism. Yet it could not free itself of that link, or of its necessity. Certainly, as we have just seen, after World War II liberals understood how important it was to continuously monitor and correct the liberal “virtuous circle.” In other words, they grafted a significant “artificial” component, dependent on deliberate and voluntary political action, onto a system believed to have been kept too “natural” until then, based on the automatic mechanisms of the invisible hand. While this was by no means a small transformation, it was also in no way sufficient to emancipate liberalism from an optimistic conception of history. Political artifice necessarily continued to play an ancillary role to the spontaneous and positive dynamics of the virtuous circle between liberty and progress, which it never replaced.

The extent to which liberalism remained structurally dependent on that virtuous circle and its automatisms, even in the second half of the twentieth century, is proven by the ideological vicissitudes of liberal internationalism—namely, of Liberal International (LI) and of European Liberal Democrats (ELD)—between 1947 and 1989.³⁰ Europe's main liberal political forces merged into these two institutions, which may therefore reasonably be regarded as representative, at the very least, of European party liberalism.³¹ Their documents attest to an

²⁹ In Italy, a long debate on “armed” liberalism took place immediately after World War II. For a collection of texts based on that debate, see F. Mazzei, ed., *Liberalismo e “democrazia protetta”: Un dibattito alle origini dell'Italia repubblicana* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2011).

³⁰ On this point, refer to G. Orsina, “La globalizzazione dal volto umano. L'ideologia dell'internazionalismo liberale, 1945–1989,” in *Leadership e culture politiche nell'Europa degli anni Ottanta*, ed. G. Orsina (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2011).

³¹ The LI was a prevalingly European institution until the end of the 1970s; only in the 1980s, also owing to the ELD's birth, did it extend beyond European borders; see

extremely rich and complex ideological heritage, which is also characterized by countless conflicts between equally important yet apparently incompatible (or at least, not necessarily compatible) principles.

This set of values and priorities could in no way achieve an acceptable level of coherence, if not owing to the fact that it was based on the necessary link between freedom and progress—that is, on the certainty that human rights, as well as being a “fundamental necessity for mankind,” are an “essential precondition for progress and stability,”³² and, as a result, that there is no conflict between respect for the individual and economic growth, but rather a spontaneous convergence of the two. On the conviction that “man is first and foremost a being endowed with the power of independent thought and action, and with the ability to distinguish right from wrong,” and, what’s more important, that he is able to progress positively in liberty: “freely conscious of their obligations to stand by other citizens and ready to support the institutions and measures directed towards that end”; ready to make “an active personal contribution to social welfare and to the development towards a truly humane society”; capable of generating “a world where people strive to live in partnership instead of one where they seek benefit through domination”; sustained by social progress and at the same time intent on promoting it. “Confronted by the growing challenge of collectivism, open or disguised, we put our faith as ever in a free society where equality of opportunity fosters the development of those qualities of individual responsibility and initiative and that readiness to defend liberty against external or internal aggression which are essential for political, social and economic progress.”³³

J. Smith, *A Sense of Liberty: The History of the Liberal International* (London: Liberal International, 1997), 43f.

³² “Human Rights: The Fundamental Necessity for Mankind and an Essential Precondition for Progress and Stability” is the title of the Ottawa Human Rights Appeal, approved by the 1987 LI Congress, http://www.liberal-international.org/editorial.asp?ia_id=919.

³³ Quotations are taken from the following sources: “Oxford Manifesto,” LI’s founding document, 1947, and G. Malagodi’s report “The Attainment of European Union as a Contribution to World Stability and Peace,” 1974, both of which may be found in E. Camurani and B. Vono, eds., *Liberal International Resolutions—Résolutions*, vol. 1 (Florence: Sansoni, 1975); “From the Welfare State to a Truly Humane Society,” resolution

Finally, on the persuasion that time will flow to the advantage of liberals, enabling reasonable men in a free society to progress materially and morally in the long run—which moral and material advancement, in its turn, will enable society to become increasingly free and men to become increasingly reasonable, until every conflict of values is solved naturally: “ecology and economy are not contradictory because *in the long term* economic and environmental interests are one and the same”; the choice on the part of free countries to defend human rights in all places “may lead states into conflict with their short-term interests” but, “*In the longer term* such policies are often the most successful”; “*In the long term*, the poverty of large parts of the world can best be alleviated through freedom of trade.”³⁴

The persistence of progressive optimism in post-Second World War liberalism, attested to by LI and ELD documents, shows the extent to which this peculiar philosophy of history is structurally necessary to the liberal project, and therefore—forgive the unfortunate phrasing, but tautology is inherent in the reality of the matter—how the historical success of that project is dependent on the historical success of that philosophy. If this is in fact the case, and if it is also true that the Great War and the events of the 1920s and 1930s were the final nail in the coffin of nineteenth-century progressive optimism, then it is easy to see why—as Roger Motz lamented in 1946—post-Second World War liberalism was not only “embedded,” but also “without liberals.” Hence, it is easy to see why, except on specific occasions and for contingent reasons that had little to do with ideology, no European liberal party was able to attract more than a handful of votes throughout the second half of the twentieth century. The weakness of European party

approved by the LI Congress in 1982, in *Carte di Giovanni Malagodi*, Fondazione Luigi Einaudi in Rome (henceforth CM), b. 296, f. 27; draft resolution presented at the summit of liberal and democratic leaders in Copenhagen, 10 April 1989, *ibid.*, b. 328, f. 70; “Problems of Social Security in a Free Society,” resolution approved by the LI Congress in 1957, in *Liberal International Resolutions—Résolutions*, vol. 1.

³⁴ The first quotation is from the “World Environmental Policy,” resolution approved by the LI Congress in 1986, in CM, b. 296, f. 27; the other two are from points 41 and 25 of the “Liberal Appeal of Rome,” document approved by the LI in 1981 and reproduced in E. Camurani, ed., *Liberal International Resolutions—Résolutions*, vol. 2 (Bologna: Li Causi Editore, 1983); emphasis added.

liberalism has been explained primarily in the light of two phenomena. On the one hand, the success of liberal principles, which supposedly made parties with specific liberal connotations superfluous. On the other hand, liberalism's inability to find a placement for itself along the Right-Left continuum, based on class politics.³⁵ As pointed out elsewhere,³⁶ I find neither one of these explanations entirely convincing. While both lines of reasoning seem well founded to me, I also believe the two flaws ascribed to party liberalism are neither structural nor necessary. I believe they are the consequence of the preceding (both in chronological and in causative terms) "historical falsification" carried out against liberalism between 1914 and 1945, particularly to the detriment of progressive optimism, one of its irreplaceable components.

It was this fragility, and the concurrent awareness of this weakness, that turned liberals into victims, rather than protagonists, of the political realignment processes that characterized the decades after 1945. And left them with only two options: either accept a political framework that restricted and penalized them, carving out a residual space for themselves as a third, centrist force—reasonable and concerned with the common good, and able to "lubricate" institutions educating other parties on the values of liberty and democracy, moderating the harshness of the clash between right and left, and finding a common ground for opposing classes—or make a desperate attempt to break the mold and set forth a new paradigm, such as the one based on the dichotomy between freedom and lack of freedom, which would restore their hegemonic position. Both options were unsatisfactory: the former, because it entailed accepting electoral marginality; and the latter, because right from the start it had very limited chances of success (indeed, success was never achieved in the years between 1945 and 1989). This state of affairs generated frustration, which in post-Second World War liberal political circles was also sometimes mixed with pride and a sense of superiority. On the one hand, liberals realized they had understood reality sooner and more keenly than their political opponents,

³⁵ See the introductory essay in Kirchner's *Liberal Parties in Western Europe*, where Gordon Smith briefly and effectively presents the two reasons for the weakness of liberalism.

³⁶ Orsina, "La globalizzazione dal volto umano."

that they were the real victors of the twentieth century, and that the future—or “eternity,” to quote Benedetto Croce—belonged to them. On the other hand, they realized that they were only able to attract the support of small minority groups. “But it is said that Liberalism is everywhere weak. Its voice is the voice of reason, but men will not harken to it. It points to the lessons of experience, but mankind will not learn from experience.”³⁷

³⁷ V. Samuel, “Liberals and the Other Parties,” in *Spires of Liberty* (Swindon Wilts: Swindon Press, 1948), 72. The reference to Croce is taken from the famous epilogue to *History of Europe in the Nineteenth Century*: “When the question is heard whether liberty will enjoy what is known as the future, the answer must be that it has something better still—it has eternity” (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1933), 358.

Totalitarianism avant la lettre

VITTORIO STRADA

To say that anti-Stalinism is an ambiguous concept is not to diminish its liberating value within the communist movement, as well as, indirectly, for the world that opposed it. In addition to individual denunciations of Stalin (such as Koestler's and Silone's), two major attacks were launched against his system of power. The first was the one by his rival to succeed Lenin, Leon Trotsky. The latter fought against Stalin while still in the Soviet Union, and then, in a more overt and systematic way, after his expulsion from it in 1929. The democratic West provided him with an environment conducive to an open war against the man he believed had betrayed the Bolshevik revolution. Stalin paid him back with boundless violence, which was verbal first, in the form of a campaign of denigration and falsification, and then physical, when he had him assassinated by one of his agents. The second attack—different from the first in both nature and effectiveness, as well as with regard to the historical moment in which it occurred—was launched in the highest echelons of the Soviet Union's communist power, soon after Stalin's death, by one of his close collaborators, Nikita Khrushchev, during the 20th Congress of the Communist party.

These two anti-Stalinisms cannot be placed on the same plane. In a sense, the former war was heroic. It was waged by a man who was nearly alone, with only a handful of followers, against a foe, Stalin, at the height of his power, which extended from the USSR to the world communist movement at large. Trotsky's counterpower lay only in the denunciation of his opponent's misdeeds, carried out in his books and articles. Khrushchev, on the other hand, enjoyed a long career under Stalin, and denounced the late tyrant only as he seized on his legacy

from a position of force at the helm of the Party, with the support of the leadership apparatus. The latter acknowledged—in some cases with reluctance—that a partial condemnation of Stalinist conduct was needed to give the communist movement new impetus.

What these two anti-Stalinisms had in common was their emergence from within communism, whose integrity they both wished to safeguard, albeit in different ways, without challenging its ideology or otherwise subjecting it to any criticism. In a way, as is logical in a political war, both anti-Stalinisms were instrumental, which accounts for their limits and peculiarities. Trotsky intended to defend the revolution whose main political and organizational responsibility he bore together with Lenin. He wanted to support a line of action that he believed was the organic continuation of the revolutionary project, against what he saw as its deviation and degeneration, Stalinism's "revolution betrayed," as he would label it. Trotsky could not admit that Stalin was—if not Lenin's sole legitimate continuator, as Stalin proclaimed himself to be—at least one of the potential alternatives implicit in the original revolution. To do so, he would have had to call himself into question, as well as Lenin and "their" revolution. Trotsky hinged his anti-Stalinism precisely on Leninism and his fidelity to it, sparking a war between two orthodoxies, for Stalin professed an even greater adherence to Leninism.

Decades later, the case of Khrushchev and the whole communist leadership is at once clearer and more complicated. The new head of the Kremlin had on his hands a Stalin who, after the triumph of the anti-Nazi war, had reached the height of glory, and, upon his death, had left behind him a great empire, which his heirs now wanted to safeguard and reinforce. This led to somersaults in official anti-Stalinism. Whereas the latter was set on tearing down the "cult" of Stalin, by denouncing his tactical errors and criminal excesses, it also defended its substance, as the political line of a party whose strategy could never be wrong. In opposition to the now-rejected cult of Stalin, it set forth a renewed and strengthened cult of Lenin's personality, as well as of Marxism-Leninism in general (created by Stalin) and of the October Revolution (while maintaining Stalinist contempt for one of its leading figures, Trotsky). How confused and frenzied the resulting situation

came to be is plain to those who experienced it firsthand at the time, as well as to those who now study it historically. The fact remains that the official anti-Stalinism initiated by Khrushchev had the unexpected effect (unexpected for Khrushchev and his partners, that is) of dealing the first irreparable blow against the communist ideological and political system it intended to protect and strengthen by criticizing the cult of Stalin. Thus opened a complex historical phase, which drew to a close with the collapse of the entire system under Mikhail Gorbachev, the last secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

This is where the positive part played by the anti-Stalinism stemming from within the communist movement ends. Its limits are apparent. On the one hand, it merely criticized and repudiated Stalin, without addressing earlier circumstances as the precondition for his rise, and indeed as the soil in which the latter was rooted. It thereby avoided carrying out a historical analysis of Lenin and Leninism, of the Bolshevik revolution and of Marxist doctrine, and regarded “Stalinism” as an independent phenomenon, a “betrayal” and “degeneration” of a movement that was positive and pure. It believed that, once cured of the Stalinist disease, the communist organism would regain vigor and health. On the other hand, it eschewed and banned from the realm of critical analysis the theoretical-political concept of “totalitarianism,” elaborated by liberal democratic thought to interpret the new form of ultra-authoritarian regimes peculiar to the historical context of twentieth-century Europe, and substantially different from traditional ones. Both Stalinism and communism were thus shielded from in-depth structural and comparative examination. Communist anti-Stalinism created the illusion that an internal “democratization” process would take the system back to its pristine Marxist and Leninist origins, polluted by a corrupting monster, Stalin, who had mysteriously penetrated into the system’s inner sanctum. In fact, the self-proclaimed purifiers had been the most loyal collaborators of the corruptor, whose ideology and mentality they maintained. Yet this state of affairs, for all its ambiguity and murkiness, opened a new phase of authentic intellectual and political purification among those who found themselves within communist regimes and parties, or even under their hegemony. Anti-Stalinism became the first step of criticism of the entire system

born from the October Revolution, as well as of its Marxist theoretical promises. This well-known story unfolded during the last decades of the twentieth century in the countries of the Soviet bloc and in the parties associated with it in Western Europe, and became intertwined with the great world political events that led to the democratic revolutions (or counter-revolutions) of 1989, which were not anti-Stalinist but anti-communist, and culminated in the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

It is the dramatic and complex story of the liberation of oppressed peoples and “captive minds,” as Czesław Miłosz referred to them in the title of his excellent book.¹ This process, however, has not yet come to a victorious end, for traces of official anti-Stalinism remain in place, which often fail to reach the Leninist and Marxist roots of the “cult of Stalin” by way of an adequate historical analysis. The latter needs to consider the substantial unity of communism, and, within communism, the differences in the personal and historical characters of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin (the last two were not only theoretical politicians, but also practical politicians, heads of their party and state, who wielded great power and engaged in a war of actions and ideas).² Far from being a static system, the Soviet totalitarian regime too underwent a certain development, transitioning from an early formative stage to one of practical affirmation, and finally to one of decline ending with its collapse.

Now that we have clarified the question of anti-Stalinism and the reasons for its ambiguity, we will not follow the political controversy and the historiographic research linked to it, nor will we analyze the concept of totalitarianism over its more than fifty-year evolution.³

¹ C. Miłosz, *The Captive Mind* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981).

² Studies to this effect include the book by L. Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), trans. P.S. Falla; a series of investigations on the complex relationship between Stalinism, Leninism and Marxism disseminated in several publications; see, for example, the work by the Polish scholar and historian of Russian political thought, A. Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom: The Rise and Fall of the Communist Utopia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

³ Among the many works on totalitarianism, see A. Siegel, ed., *The Totalitarian Paradigm after the End of Communism: Towards a Theoretical Reassessment* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), and E. Traverso, ed., *Le Totalitarisme: Le XXe Siècle en débat* (Paris: Seuil, 2001).

Instead, we will focus on an episode of the Russian political culture of the early 1900s that casts light on both these issues, and points to questions that emerged decades later. This episode of non-orthodox Russian Marxism was able to predict, *avant la lettre*, that totalitarianism would be the natural outcome of communist revolutionism.

In a sense, we might say that true Western Marxism, or rather European Marxism, was the (revisionist) one developed in Russia before Leninism triumphed, not the one generally associated with the names of Gramsci and Lukács, which was essentially a “Westernized Leninism.”

“Legal Marxism” and the Religious Nature of Socialism

In the complex unfolding of Russian Marxism—one of the most interesting chapters of Marxist history, because of the deep resonance and intense development of Marx’s ideas in Russia, and because of the attention Marx paid to his Russian readers and followers, as well as to that country’s history⁴—a marginal but by no means negligible role is played by “legal Marxism,” called thus because Marx’s writings could circulate freely. This Marxism was born when the philosopher’s ideas first began to circulate as more than just an intellectual element absorbed into populism, but as a principle of political organization thanks to the establishment of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, whose manifesto, during its first congress (1898), was written by one of the chief proponents of legal Marxism, Peter Struve. Contrasted

Also worth mentioning is the book by B. Bruneteau, *Le totalitarisme, origines d’un concept, genèse d’un débat 1930–1942* (Paris: Cerf, 2010), not only for its introductory essay, but also for the vast selection of texts covering the time period discussed, which attest to the fact that the concept of totalitarianism was born within European democratic political culture before World War II, and that it was not the result of the Cold War, as its detractors sometimes maintain. See also V. Strada, ed., *Totalitarismo e totalitarismi* (Venice: Marsilio, 2003), and S. Kuleshov and V. Strada, *Il fascismo russo* (Venice: Marsilio, 1998), which deals with a meaningful and little-known aspect of the issue.

⁴ B. Naarden, *Socialist Europe and Revolutionary Russia: Perception and Prejudice, 1848–1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); V.A. Tvardovskaia and B.S. Itenberg, *Russkie i Karl Marx: vybor ili sudba?* (Moscow: Editorial URSS, 1999).

with revolutionary Marxism, which in the early 1900s split into Menshevism and Bolshevism, legal Marxism had a different development. Its members came to be intellectually the most prominent representatives of Russian liberalism and, moving in a different direction after they outgrew Marxism, of Christian socialism. Russian “legal Marxists” were not only the first “revisionists of Marxism,” as suggested by the title of Richard Kindersley’s book.⁵ Compared with Bernstein, they were also the more thorough, for they extended their critical analysis from the sphere of economy, which was central, to those of philosophy and religion.

The latter was particularly important and allowed them to find the source of “political religion,” addressed in due course by theorists of totalitarianism, in Marx’s works. A convergence later occurred between legal Marxists and some exponents of Bolshevism, which was paradoxical in that, while both camps agreed that Bolshevism had a religious nature, one saw it as a positive thing, while the other saw it as a negative thing. This opens a new perspective on the totalitarian “cult” (not only of Stalin).

Nikolai Berdyaev poses the problem of “political religion” distinctly separating two kinds of socialism, both in existence within Russian social democracy but radically different from each other. The first, labeled “neutral socialism,” gave itself an “organizational” task, that is, to ensure dignified living conditions for the working class. In this sense, Berdyaev believed it had “enormous importance in the life of contemporary humanity” and that it would “play a large role in future history.” From a religious point of view, this kind of socialism was neutral. It simply prepared “the ground on which the greatest variety of flowers

⁵ R. Kindersley, *The First Russian Revisionists: A Study of “Legal Marxism” in Russia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962). Among the many monographs on the subject, please refer to Kindersley’s, as well as to more general histories of Marxism. See also V. Strada, ed., *La critica al marxismo in Russia agli inizi del secolo* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1991), and the monograph eloquently titled “justification of revisionism” by T.I. Ojzerman, *Opravdanie revizionizma* (Moscow: 2005). The book opens with a treatise on “Marxism and dogmatism” (from Marx to Lenin, and to the Soviet communist ideology); it then follows the prehistory of Bernstein’s revisionism, and analyzes the revisionism of Russian populism and legal Marxism; finally, it focuses on Bernstein and on other forms of European revisionism.

will spring up.” This socialism did not “pretend to be a dogma,” or “try to replace religion.” Instead, it acted “within the social sphere,” which was “the arena of battle for opposing religious principles, but in and of itself [was] not one of those principles.” It was a process of “humanization of humanity,” the “overcoming of primitive brutality” and of an equally primitive rule.⁶

“Socialist religion” was something altogether different, for it was not the “organization of economic life” and the “satisfaction of humanity’s economic requirements.” “It is a complete dogma, a solution to the question of the meaning of life, the purpose of history. It is the preaching of socialist morality, socialist philosophy, socialist science, and socialist art.” In this kind of socialism, “past religions are replaced. All problems of religious consciousness solve themselves; human truth no longer appears. It is not a matter of a neutral environment out of which opposing religious principles can grow; rather there emerges in it something already superhuman, final, religiously disturbing, not religiously indifferent.”

Berdyaev believed this kind of socialism contained a “super-historical principle, an atheistic principle,” and that its passion was “linked to the deification of the future humanity.” What Berdyaev termed “religious socialism” was communism (and Bolshevism according to its first Russian definition), as opposed to reformist and revisionist “neutral socialism.” Indeed, he further wrote that the “Social Democracy established by Marxism is the most perfect and finished form . . . of religious socialism.”

Another legal Marxist, Sergei Bulgakov, who authored several studies, ranging in subject matter from economy to history and philosophy, held a similar position. In one of his books, *Karl Marx as a Religious Type*,⁷ he played up the young philosopher’s derivation from Feuerbach, to the detriment of his relation to Hegel. As with other works on Marxism in Bulgakov’s production, this study’s worth lies in the attention it draws to the atheistic character and concurrent pseudo-religious

⁶ N.A. Berdyaev, *Novoe religioznoe soznanie i obshchestvennost* (Moscow: Kanon, [1907] 1999), 128–29. Subsequent quotations are from these pages.

⁷ In S. Bulgakov, *Dva grada* (Moscow: Put, 1911).

fervor of Marx, the prophet of a new future humanity freed from all alienation. In his book *Philosophy of Economy*, Bulgakov penned the following words:

Even though Marx was insensitive to the problem of religion, this does not at all mean that he was indifferent to the issue of religiosity and to the existence of religion. On the contrary, internal extraneousness, as is often the case, arouses not indifferentism, but direct hostility to this external and unfathomable world. This was precisely Marx's attitude toward religion. Marx's stance on religion, and particularly on theism and Christianity, was doggedly hostile, for he was a combative atheist who aspired to free and to cure humankind from religious folly, from spiritual slavery.⁸

In his introduction to the proposed work *Critique to Hegel's Philosophy of Right* published in the *German-French Annals* (1844), Marx wrote that "the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness." In the same text, he formulated his famous maxim on religion as the "opium of the people," according to which "the criticism of religion disillusions man" and is the prerequisite for every other criticism (legal, political, economic) of "man's alienation."⁹ Although its decisive import is often ignored or willfully neglected, herein lies the heart of Marx's entire activity and thought according to Bulgakov. In his *Karl Marx as a Religious Type*, Bulgakov concluded that Marx gave the "best" of his philosophical thought—by which he always abided—in his writings for the *German-French Annals* (the same might be said of his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844, of which Bulgakov had no knowledge, because they were published a few decades later). This led to a paradox: "the greatest material with which to understand Marx and evaluate him . . . comes from the period before he was a Marxist, when his authentic spiritual physiognomy had not yet been concealed behind the details of the specialized research with which he made a name for himself."¹⁰ Bulgakov believes

⁸ S. Bulgakov, *Filosofia khoziaistva* (Moscow: Nauka, 1990 [1912]), 317–18.

⁹ Marx's text comes from the *German-French Annals* (*Deutsch–Französische Jahrbücher*).

¹⁰ Bulgakov, *Dva grada*, 98.

the author of *Capital* displays a substantial unity of thought; he sees no contrast between a young and a mature Marx. Marked by ongoing discoveries, Marx's intellectual work evolved and extended around an atheistic and anti-Christian philosophical-religious core, which constituted its essence.

At the end of his examination, Bulgakov ventures to say something both contrary to the "dominant opinion" and "quite plausible": "even without Marx, the labor movement would have taken its current political form and a Social Democratic labor party would have been created with a similar program and an equal tactic to that of the existing one. Yet on this Marx impressed the indelible mark of his spirit." He further clarifies:

Marx's entire doctrine followed from his basic religious motive: militant atheism. Economic materialism, the preaching of class hatred *à outrance*, the denial of universal human values and of universally valid moral norms transcending class interests, and finally the concept of an impassable gulf that divides two worlds: the proletariat with its lofty mission and the whole "reactionary mass" of its exploiters—all these teachings were, naturally, bound to coarsen the socialist movement, to give it a more prosaic and economic character, making class hatred resound more loudly than universal love.¹¹

In Bulgakov's "Christian socialist" eyes this was tantamount to creating an anti-Christian pseudo-religion averse to evangelical religiosity.¹²

The "God-Builders"

Alongside the various trends of Russian religious thought—jointly involved in what was known as "God-seeking," wherein different thinkers brought into the sphere of traditional Christian culture a will for renewal in opposition to clerical dogmatism shut off from modern

¹¹ Ibid., 102–3.

¹² On this issue, refer to his writings in S. Bulgakov, *Khristianskii sotsializm* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1991).

life—another movement arose within Russian Marxism, specifically within its most radical faction, Bolshevism. This movement engaged in what was known as “God-building.”¹³ This had nothing to do with a yearning for a transcendental God, existing beyond the canonical forms of his representation. Rather, it was an act that stemmed from the repudiation of all transcendence and aimed to create a purely earthly, historical god. It was a “religious atheism” that rejected all past faiths and set forth a new one, linked with the total revolution that the proletariat, the people’s vanguard, was going to bring about on earth, unifying all humanity, according to Marx’s prophecy. Anatoly Lunacharsky, a party comrade of Lenin, was the theoretician of this God-building, whereas Maxim Gorky, the proletariat writer, was its leading apostle. In *Religion and Socialism*, his most important work and the historical-theoretical foundation of God-building, Lunacharsky writes that Marx’s is “a religious philosophy that springs from past religious research, made fruitful by humanity’s economic growth.” And it is “the clearest, most tangible and most active solution to all the ‘damned questions’ of human self-consciousness that old religious systems solved in an illusory way.”

Further, “Marxism as a philosophy is the new, ultimate religious system—profoundly critical, purifying, and at once synthetic.”¹⁴ The idea was that Marxism assimilated in itself all the great religions of the past in the form of a legacy, which it radically transformed, bringing heaven back to earth in accord with Feuerbach’s and Marx’s teachings. Marxism returned to man what man, alienating himself, had transferred to god. This meant making humankind itself divine, albeit in an entirely immanent sense. Humankind in its unity absorbed the

¹³ In 1909, the God-builders held a (Bolshevik, but dissenting from Lenin) “Party School” in Capri, where Gorky resided at the time. See V. Strada, ed., *L'altra rivoluzione, Gor'kij-Lunačarskij-Bogdanov: La “Scuola di Capri” e la “Costruzione di Dio”* (Capri: La Conchiglia, 1994). For a broad overview of this trend in Russian philosophical-religious thought in the early twentieth century, see J. Scherrer, *Die Petersburger Religiös-Philosophischen Vereinigungen: Die Entwicklung des religiösen Selbstverständnisses ihrer Intelligencija-Mitglieder (1901–1917)* (Berlin: Osteuropa-Institut, 1973).

¹⁴ A. Lunacharsky, *Religiia i sotsializm*, vol. II (Saint Petersburg: Shipovnik, 1911). The quoted passages are on page 326 and on page 213, respectively.

individual, giving rise to a collective superhuman of sorts, and to a new man, who was the result of revolutionary palingenesis. It was a “godless religion,” the religion of an almighty humanity. The proletariat was the new messiah. Lunacharsky theorized this new religion, but Gorky gave it pathos in his novel *The Confession*, whose hero, after wandering at length in search of God, finally found him by merging into a collective humanity endowed with thaumaturgic powers. Lenin—whose atheism was nihilistic, fanatical, and virulent—could not accept what he saw as a dangerous play with religion, and sternly opposed this trend within his party.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the God-builders believed themselves to be the true Bolsheviks, the authentic voices of Marxist revolution.¹⁶ That ideas akin to God-building were widespread among radical Marxists is apparent in Trotsky’s words, where he extols the radical metamorphosis of humankind ensured by the triumphant revolution, which would ultimately create “a superior socio-biological type, a superhuman, if you will.”¹⁷ This “communist mysticism” merged, tacitly but organically, into Marxism-Leninism, most forcibly in the Stalinist period, finding a peculiar expression in “socialist realism.” The religious atheism of Lunacharsky and Gorky, and later of Soviet ideology, corresponded to what Bulgakov had identified within Marxism. Antonio Gramsci’s position overlapped with the one espoused by the God-builders, and therefore with Bulgakov’s analysis. According to the Italian theoretician, “socialism is precisely the religion that must overwhelm Christianity. [Socialism is] religion in the sense that it too is a faith with its mystics and rituals; religion because it has substituted for the consciousness of the transcendental God of the Catholics, the faith in man and in his

¹⁵ Among the many works on Lenin, I recommend my own: see V. Strada, *Lenin, Stalin, Putin: Studi su comunismo e postcomunismo* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2010). Denunciations, avant la lettre, of the totalitarianism implicit in Leninist theory came not only from the democratic-liberal camp, but also from socialists (Mensheviks) and from dissident Bolsheviks (Bogdanov).

¹⁶ See A. Bogdanov et al., *Fede e scienza: La polemica su “materialismo ed empiriocriticismo” di Lenin* (Turin: Einaudi, 1982), and, in particular, my introductory essay “Né fede né scienza,” in V. Strada, *Lenin, Stalin, Putin*.

¹⁷ L. Trotsky, *Letteratura e rivoluzione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), 225.

great strengths as a unique spiritual reality.”¹⁸ This was the essence of Gramsci’s thought, of his Marxism as religion, and of his Western totalitarianism.

Totalitarianism and Political Religion

Thirty years later, Eric Voegelin revived the concept of “political religion” in connection with the by-then triumphant totalitarian regimes. He spoke of “movements that want to be anti-religious and atheistic,” and “refuse to concede that religious experiences can be found at the root of their fanatical attitude, only venerating as sacred something else than the religion they fight.”¹⁹ He provides the example of Hitler: “The Führer is the point where the spirit of the people breaks into historical reality: the inner-worldly god speaks to the Führer in the same way the transcendent God speaks to Abraham, and the Führer transforms god’s word into commands for his immediate followers and for the people.”²⁰

Another political mythology had it that the objective process of history, scientifically interpreted by Marxism-Leninism, would speak to the proletariat and to the people through the Leader. A few years after Voegelin, Raymond Aron also analyzed and applied the concept of political religion, which he called secular religion. In his long article “L’avenir des religions séculières,” Aron speaks of socialism (in Berdyaev’s sense of “religious socialism”) as “essentially against religion,” for, according to the young Marx’s grandiose expectations,

it was to put an end to “religious alienations,” as well as to all other alienations. Once he has become the master of his works, man will find his contentment in the real community. He will no longer be inclined to seek substitutes for his disappointed strivings in transcendental images.

¹⁸ A. Gramsci, *Cronache torinesi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), 329. English translation by J. V. Femia, *Gramsci’s Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1981).

¹⁹ M. Henningsen, ed., *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 5 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 32.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

But, on the other hand, socialism is a religion to the same extent that it is an anti-religion. While it denies the existence of an afterlife, it brings back to earth certain hopes that, until recently, only transcendental beliefs could stir. I propose to use the term “secular religions” for those doctrines that, in the souls of our contemporaries, replace the vanished faith, and set humanity’s salvation in this world, in the distant future, and in the form of a social order yet to be established.²¹

Aron then proceeds to argue his thesis, and to delineate the “conflicts” between “secular religions,” namely, between National Socialism and communism.

After all that has been said so far, the content of the text titled *Leninism, a New Religion in Russia*—a report Josef Hirsá, a Ukrainian-born Czechoslovakian diplomat and an expert on Russia, sent from Moscow to Prague on January 6, 1926—should come as no surprise. In this report, recently drawn from the archives and published,²² Hirsá speaks of the then nascent “cult” of Lenin. The following passage is taken from its opening:

Russian communists, who seize every opportunity to profess themselves atheists and the champions of realism, and to claim that the previous power enslaved the population by way of religion, and who, particularly right after the Bolshevik revolution, persecuted every religion, which they continue to do, and ridiculed religious rites, and extracted holy relics from sepulchers to convince people they possessed no special powers and were not to be feared, now, after governing Russia for eight years, have apparently reached a different conclusion. The changes in the communists’ tactic in this regard began to make themselves known in earnest particularly after Lenin’s death. It is not at all exaggerated to say that Russia has acquired a new religion called Leninism, a religion that has its own rites, as well as its own preaching of intangibility, exclusivity, and infallibility.

²¹ The article was republished in *Commentaire*, February 28–29, 1985, in the issue dedicated to Raymond Aron, 368f.

²² V.A. Shishkin, *Rossiiá v gody “Velikogo pereloma” v vospriiatii inostrannogo diplomata (1925–1931 gg.)* (Saint Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1999).

Hirsa then goes on to illustrate this religion, whose “prophet is Lenin,” describing his mausoleum in the Red Square, and its “mystically red crypt, where his embalmed body lies in a glass sarcophagus.”²³

The diplomat underlines aspects of this new “cult” that, from a formal point of view, appear to be religious. Yet, if one doesn’t count relics, mummies played no part in Russian Christian worship. In truth, more than a religion, it was a new mythology born with a series of dogmas and rites. These concerned Lenin and later Stalin (before his mummy was removed from the mausoleum), but also, primarily, the Communist Party, the October Revolution, Marxism-Leninism, and a number of lesser entities and figures. The ground had been prepared by the atheist faith that legal Marxists found in religious socialism, and in Marx himself, as well as by the God-builders’ project to bring forth a new religion for humanity, delivered from sin and unified by the revolution. Indeed, totalitarian political religion thrived in the USSR, and indirectly in the world communist movement, and, at its peak, took on the form of a cult of Stalin’s personality. Yet totalitarian political religion did not stop after Stalin was removed from the country’s altars, where other idols, first and foremost Lenin, continued to be the object of intense worship (though this became increasingly official and hollow). Of course, all the above does not amount to a complete theory of totalitarianism—such a theory was elaborated later. Nor does it provide a comprehensive explanation of communist totalitarianism, whose history is complex, and made up of diverse economic and political, domestic and international elements. Nevertheless, what revisionist and radical Marxists foresaw or planned in Russia in the early 1900s is a meaningful but little-known phenomenon, which casts light on the tragic events that followed. By desacralizing the Soviet system, official anti-Stalinism marked the end of “communism as religion,”²⁴ the end of the last political or secular religion, and the end of the last and biggest totalitarian regime, which was also the first to be born at the beginning of the twentieth century.

²³ Ibid., 104.

²⁴ This is the title of a book by a Russian scholar of philosophy: M. Ryklin, *Kommunizm kak religii: intellektualy i Oktiabrskaiia revoliutsiia* (Moscow: NLO, 2009).

Totalitarianism and Ideological Hubris

VLADIMIR TISMANEANU

The main pillars of totalitarianism were the monopolistic party, the ideological utopian project, and the leader.¹ Totalitarianism was also based on direct or indirect terror. The secret police was the instrument that maintained the population in a state of universal fear, distrust, and suspicion. Even if the concept has been criticized, sometimes justifiably, for its neglect of societal components and everyday life under ideocratic regimes, it still has an impressive descriptive force.² Totalitarian regimes yearned for the establishment of “perfect societies” and engaged in endless campaigns to achieve their goals. In this chapter, I map out the main features of these new forms of political radicalism, looking for both similarities and differences. On the one side, I focus on the relationship between leaders and parties, on the other side, on visions of society, progress, and identity within the societies undergoing a project of total politics. In this analysis, matters such as morality, exterminism, and homogenization come into play, revealing deeper structures of thought and motivation instrumental to the mobilization

¹ I am thinking about two fundamental traditions in understanding the meaning of the concept “totalitarianism”: the first scholars who attempted to define it as a new form of radical politics (either historians or political philosophers) such as Hannah Arendt, Raymond Aron, Karl-Dietrich Bracher, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Martin Malia, Richard Pipes, Leonard Schapiro; the second, the view from within, the writings of Eastern European dissidents (some of them with distinct histories of involvement with late fifteenth revisionism) such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Vaclav Havel, Jacek Kuron, Adam Michnik, Agnes Heller, Ferenc Feher, Leszek Kolakowski.

² For an illuminating discussion of the moral implications of various comparative approaches to the main totalitarian experiments, see M. Malia, “Judging Nazism and Communism,” *The National Interest* 69 (2002): 63–78.

within and reproduction of totalitarian movements such as fascism and Bolshevism. In the end, their ideological hubris was both the initial ground for belonging and membership to these movements and the ultimate reason for their denouement. In the case of communism, apostasy would generate delegitimation and, finally, systemic collapse.

Totalitarian parties were ideological laboratories that functioned on the basis of ideological blueprints, and affixed on whole societies their millenarian visions. Not satisfied with overturning social and economic conditions, these parties/movements aspired to bring about anthropological revolutions and engender the “New Man.”³ Communism and fascism created their own ideological bureaucracies that supervised, oriented, and regimented the masses. In the case of the USSR, this bureaucratic network “included the divisions of the party apparatus, the ministries of education and culture, the subdivisions of the KGB, the secretariats of the professional unions, and the presidium of the Academy of Sciences.”⁴ Ideological activities were regarded in Soviet-style regimes, as well as in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, as a chain of warfare operation, a “front” with officers, soldiers, allies, and enemies.

At the same time, the leader was not simply a traditional ruler, a despot in the classical sense, but rather the custodian of truth. Kenneth Jowitt correctly noticed that “there is a constant tendency in Leninism toward strong executive leaders.”⁵ Sometimes though, communist parties invoked also the leadership of a Messiah-like prophet, of a charismatic guide.⁶ Stalin’s and Mao’s cases are the most obvious, but Nicolae Ceaușescu, Enver Hoxha, Ho Chi Min, and others come to

³ This focus on the “New Man” was noticed in 1932 by German political scientist Walde-mar Gurian, one of the thinkers highly admired by Hannah Arendt. See W. Gurian, *Bolshevism: Theory and Practice* (New York: AMS Press, 1969) and H. Arendt, “Waldemar Gurian: 1903-1954,” in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 251–62.

⁴ V. Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 82–83.

⁵ K. Jowitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 10, fn. 17.

⁶ See B. Mussolini, “The Doctrine of Fascism,” in *Communism, Fascism, and Democracy*, ed. C. Cohen, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1972), 328–39.

mind as well. Continuing along Jowitt's argumentation, in an attempt to permanently confirm and sustain the "charismatic impersonalism" of the Party, under communism (particularly in its Stalinist avatars) magic, miracle, and mysticism blended in the apparently scientifically founded totalitarian doctrines. In fact, they were chiliastic ideologies shrouded in rationalistic disguise, political religions based on their own sense of original sin, fall of mankind, historical torments, and final salvation.

For Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, Bolshevism and fascism represented two incarnations of the disastrous presence of the devil in history: "The devil . . . invented ideological states, that is to say, states whose legitimacy is grounded in the fact that their owners are owners of truth. If you oppose such a state or its system, you are an enemy of truth."⁷ Both movements pretended to purify humanity of any agents of decadence and dissolution. For the communists, the enemy was represented by private property, the bourgeoisie, the priests, the kulaks. The Nazis identified the Jewish "vermin," "Judeo-Bolshevism," "Judeo-plutocracy," and Marxism as the "sources of all calamities." Fascism (and its radical version, Nazism) was adamantly anticommunist. In the 1930s, Stalinism made antifascism a pillar of its propaganda, seducing intellectuals and galvanizing resistance movements worldwide. Both party-movements execrated and denounced liberalism, democracy, parliamentarianism as degradations of true politics, one that would transcend any divisions through the establishment of perfect communities (classless or racially unified). Fundamentally atheistic, both communism and fascism organized their political objectives in discourses of alleged emancipation. They were political religions that aimed to deliver the individual from the impositions of traditional morality and legality.⁸ In the universe of these political movements evil

⁷ See L. Kolakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 189.

⁸ Throughout this chapter I alternate in analysis of fascism and communism two terms "totalitarianism" and "political religion." I chose to employ this conceptual parallelism because I consider that the two terms have complementary functions. Following Philippe Burrin, I believe that "totalitarianism sheds light on the mechanism of power and forms of domination, while political religion aims at the system of beliefs, rituals

bore the name of those who refused, rejected, or did not qualify for the illumination brought about by the specific party gospels. In the case of the left-wing totalitarianism, Igal Halfin provides an excellent formulation: “The apotheosis of Communist history—humanity holding hands and marching toward a classless paradise—cannot thus be disassociated from Stalin’s systematic attempt to eliminate those who reached the Marxist well but refused to drink from it.”⁹

Leaders and Exterminism

Psychological and psychopathological explanations for these uniquely murderous regimes are not sufficient: whereas Stalin and Hitler were incontrovertibly driven by paranoid exclusionary and exterminist impulses, it would be hard to consider Lenin a mentally unbalanced individual. As a matter of fact, even a staunch critic of Bolshevism like Christian existentialist philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev saw Lenin as a paradoxical personality, an antidemocratic, neo-Jacobin revolutionary, yet a humane individual, animated by a thirst for equality and even a passion for freedom. Going beyond the already established comparisons between Hitler and Stalin, it is important to bring Lenin into the story as the true architect of the Bolshevik dictatorship, the real founder of the Gulag system.

In my view, the twentieth century was truly Lenin’s century: by creating, in 1903, the Bolshevik Party, a novel political formation, in fact an unprecedented political institution, he crucially shattered the social-democratic praxis and a new revolutionary grammar. He was an entranced doctrinaire of Jacobin persuasion convinced that his vanguard party was entrusted by an almost religiously defined history

and symbols that establish and articulate this domination. Totalitarianism emphasizes the modernity of phenomena, particularly the techniques of power, while political religion draws attention to a long-term perspective and the historical sediment and modern reapplication of fragments of a religious culture for political purposes.” See fn. 28 in P. Burrin, “Political Religion: The Relevance of a Concept,” *History and Memory* 9 (1997): 346.

⁹ I. Halfin, “Introduction,” in *Language and Revolution: Making Modern Political Identities*, ed. I. Halfin (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 5.

to achieve its goals and make humanity content forever, no matter the human costs. The costs were indeed appalling, defying our capacity for representation. Like Maximilien Robespierre, Lenin was obsessed with establishing a community of selfless militants, the professional ascetic revolutionaries for whom there was no higher values than serving the revolutionary cause.¹⁰

Ideological fanaticism mixed with all-consuming resentment explains Lenin's destructive ambitions. Lenin was not only the founder of political propaganda, the supreme priest of a new ecclesiology, the omniscient, infallible party, but also the demiurge of the concentration camp system and the apostle of universal terror. A true Bolshevik, Martin Latsis, one of the Cheka's leaders, said in 1918: "We are not waging war on individual persons. We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class. During the investigation, we do not look for evidence that the accused acted in deed or word against the Soviet power. The first questions you ought to put are: to what class does he belong? What is his origin? What is his education and profession? And it is these questions that ought to determine the fate of the accused."¹¹

In the same vein, Hitler saw the war with the Soviet Union and Western democracies as an ideological crusade meant to destroy the ideologically dehumanized enemy.¹² Reflecting on the Katyn mass murder in April 1940 of over 20,000 Polish military and civilians by the NKVD, Viktor Zaslavsky wrote:

The Katyn massacre reveals in exemplary fashion two key and closely interconnected aspects of totalitarian rule in the 20th century: the systematic use of mass terror as an instrument of domination; and the function of ideology as a conduit of terror. These two aspects were the most destructive in the lives of the victims. . . . The attempt to build a new society by means of "scientific" methods of social hygiene and

¹⁰ R. Scurr, *Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2006).

¹¹ R. Gellately, *Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler: The Age of Social Catastrophe* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 71–72. See also the impressive documentation in D. Rayfield, *Stalin and His Hangmen: The Tyrant and Those Who Killed for Him* (New York: Random House, 2004).

¹² See J. Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda During World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

the “purging” of “bourgeois contagion” unites the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. . . . From the outset, they pursued the goal of eliminating not only their political opponents, but entire societal groups damned by reason of their very existence, “objective enemies” and “enemies of the people.” . . . Just as Auschwitz became the epitome of “ethnic cleansing,” so the Katyn Massacre can serve as the epitome of “class cleansing.”¹³

Gellately’s quotes a recollection by one of Hitler’s secretaries: “We will win this war, because we fight for an idea, and not for Jewish capitalism, which drives the soldiers of our enemies. Only Russia is dangerous, because Russia fights with the same fanaticism as we do for its worldview. But the good will be the victor, there is nothing else for it.”¹⁴ The two totalitarian movements were essentially and unflinchingly opposed to democratic values, institutions, and practices. Karl Dietrich Bracher once memorably stated that they “are the children of the age of democracy.”¹⁵ In their most accomplished form, in the Soviet Union and in Germany, Leninism and fascism represented “a ferocious attack on and a frightening alternative to liberal modernity.”¹⁶ Their simultaneous experiences situated them into “a ‘negative intimacy’ in the European framework of ‘war and revolution.’”¹⁷

Bolshevism cannot be understood without acknowledging Lenin’s paramount role. Stalin was indeed the beneficiary of a system that

¹³ V. Zaslavsky, *Class Cleansing: The Massacre at Katyn* (New York: Telos Press, 2008), 4–5.

¹⁴ R. Gellately, *Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler*, 310.

¹⁵ K.D. Bracher, *The German Dictatorship. The Origins, Structure, and Effects of National Socialism*, translated by J. Steinberg with an introduction by Peter Gay (New York: Praeger, 1970), 9.

¹⁶ P. Fritzsche and J. Hellbeck, “The New Man in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany,” in *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, ed. M. Geyer and S. Fitzpatrick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 302–41.

¹⁷ K. Clark and K. Schlögel, “Mutual Perceptions and Projections. Stalin’s Russia in Nazi Germany: Nazi Germany in the Soviet Union,” in *Beyond Totalitarianism*, 396–441. The authors discuss this communality and shared experiences for the case of Germany vs. Russia/USSR, but they insist that “there is no Berlin-Moscow connection without Rome, and no Russia-German discourse without Italian fascism. These were the sites of synchronized historical experience of an entire epoch (*Synchronisierung von Epochenfahrtung*)” (421).

Lenin had imagined and developed. In the absence of ideology, these regimes would have remained traditional tyrannies. It was the ideological pretense that made Lenin engage in his reckless attempt to radically transform society. In his footsteps, Stalin pursued the same all-transforming agenda: nature, science, language had all to be subordinated to the sacrosanct goal. The same ideological ardor, impervious to any doubt or self-questioning motivated Hitler's delusional visions of global race warfare.¹⁸ Once these political movements constructed their vision of modernity on the principle of a chosen, purified community crossing the desert of history from darkness into light, there could be only one solution for those who failed to qualify to their inclusionary criteria: excision. The same Molotov explained the repression against the families of those purged, executed, deported, or assassinated as prophylactic action: "they had to be isolated. Otherwise, they would have spread all kinds of complaints, and society would have been infected by a certain amount of demoralization."¹⁹

Similarly, in 1926, Yemelyan Yaroslavsky justified the purges decided at the 16th Party Congress (April 1929) as a method of protecting "the cells of the party and soviet organism [from] degeneration."²⁰ Such affliction-weary rhetoric about the body politic was hardly different from the one employed by Heinrich Himmler in his speech to SS leaders at Posen in October 1943. The Reichsführer-SS described Nazi

¹⁸ See R. Overy, *The Dictators. Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 483–580.

¹⁹ O. Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 249. Molotov's case is particularly baffling on the matter of loyalty to party-state vs. loyalty to one's family. His wife, Polina Zhemchuzhnaia, was accused of Zionism and cosmopolitanism in 1949. When the politburo gathered to decide her fate, Molotov dared to abstain from voting. Few days later, he apologized for his conduct, praising the "rightful" punishment decided by the Soviet motherland for his spouse. He subsequently divorced her, opting for unflinching loyalty to Stalin. Upon the dictator's death, she came back from deportation. She remarried Molotov and they lived happily ever after. Zhemchuzhnaia never criticized her husband and never publicly abhorred Stalin's murderous regime. It can be said that she was the epitome of "the comrade in life and in struggle," as the partners of the communist magnates' spouses used to be called.

²⁰ D. Priestland, *Stalinism and the Politics of Mobilization: Ideas, Power, and Terror in Inter-War Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 214.

policies as extermination of “a bacterium because we do not want in the end to be infected by the bacterium and die of it. I will not see so much as a small area of sepsis appear here or gain a hold. Wherever it may form, we will cauterize it.”²¹ Millions of human lives were destroyed as a result of the conviction that the sorry state of mankind could be corrected if only the ideologically designated “vermin” were eliminated.

The Perfect Society: Totalitarian Morality and the Utility of Humanity

Social engineering was directly connected to the principle of creating a new and better civilization based on ideological percepts. This was a general trend in interwar Europe, as “the gardening state” (Bauman) was directly associated to the achievement image of the ideal national community.²² The distinctive feature of communism and fascism was their commitment to total and radical transformation of the “human material” for the purpose of achieving social Utopia. This ideological drive to purify humanity was rooted in the scientific cult of technology and the firm belief that history had endowed the revolutionary elites (of extreme left or extreme right) with the mission to get rid of the “superfluous populations” (Hannah Arendt). Communist and fascist regimes permanently tried to excise the segments of the society that it designated as potentially inimical to their realization of Utopia.

Herein lays the essence of the totalitarian experience of the twentieth century: “the complete rejection of all barriers and all restraints that politics, civilization, morality, religion, natural feelings of compassion, and universal ideas of fraternity have constructed in order to moderate, repress, or sublimate the human potential for individual and collective violence.”²³ Upon analyzing their radicalized versions

²¹ R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 235.

²² See Z. Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) and M. Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 76–103.

²³ P. Hassner, “Beyond History and Memory,” in *Stalinism and Nazism. History and Memory Compared*, ed. H. Rousso (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 286.

of communism and fascism, that is, Stalinism and Nazism, I agree with Pierre Hassner, who argued that despite differences, the fundamental and defining common characteristic was their genocidal frenzy. Or, to use Fitzpatrick and Geyer's formulation, "the phenomenon of the Gulag as a manifestation of Soviet state violence and the Holocaust as the central site of Nazi terror convey the unmistakable message that the two regimes were *bent on genocide*."²⁴

As Arthur Koestler demonstrated, totalitarian movements disregard ethics and despise moral absolutes: "Since about the second half of the nineteenth century our ethical brakes have been more and more neglected until totalitarian dynamism made the engine run amok. We must apply the brake or we shall crush."²⁵ Neither Marxism nor fascism could include in its theoretical body an ethical component. Communism was morally sterilized or, in the words of Steven Lukes, it suffered of moral blindness.²⁶ The same can be said about fascism with its exaltation of the primeval tribal virtues and its complete disregard for the common humanity of all human beings. Echoing Richard Wagner, Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg regarded "Germanic race" as the perfect body politic. Identification with its transcendental soul was the essential experience of self-realization for the Aryan individual.²⁷ The nonbelonging were lambasted as enemies of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (racially defined popular community) and destined to persecution, exclusion, elimination, and finally, extermination.

Both political radicalisms assigned to the state its own morality granting it only "the right to define the meaning and ultimate aim of human existence." To achieve a higher version of morality, emancipated from the bondage of bourgeois hypocrisy, traditional morality could be abrogated.²⁸ Leninism and fascism presented themselves

²⁴ M. Geyer (with S. Fitzpatrick), "Introduction. After Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared," in *Beyond Totalitarianism*, 30; emphasis added

²⁵ A. Koestler, *The Trail of the Dinosaur and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 15.

²⁶ See S. Lukes, "On the Moral Blindness of Communism," in *The Lesser Evil: Moral Approaches to Genocide Practices*, ed. H. Dubiel and G. Motzkin (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 154–65.

²⁷ See the fragments from Rosenberg's book *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, in C. Cohen, *Communism, Fascism, and Democracy*, 366–368.

²⁸ See S. Lukes, *Marxism and Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

as revolutionary breakthroughs in a new sense of life. They preconditioned reconstruction by unleashing destruction. Oblivious to any independent moral dimension, both put a stress on “force and guile in shaping history,” they exposed “hypocrisy, the absurdity of human condition,” while simultaneously preaching a political zeal that was supposed to “construct meaning, and sought, through political organization and action, to bring it into being.”²⁹ Each of them was, as A.E. Rees showed, forms of “revolutionary Machiavellian conception of politics. . . . More precisely, Nazism and Bolshevism might be defined as the Machiavellianism of parties which claimed to rule in the name of the masses.”³⁰ To paraphrase Eugen Weber, in the case of both Leninism and fascism, the locomotives that dragged them across history were their tactics.

Leninism was therefore based on a “goal rationality,” which implied that “the validity of its demands for compliance is claimed to be based on a rational relationship between the ultimate goal of communism and the specific tasks assigned to social units,’ and individuals’ rationality relates to the appropriateness of the means used . . . to the goals set.”³¹ Such endemic radically utilitarian transformist conception of politics ultimately materialized in the divinization of a mythical State holding the right of life and death over its subjects. Or as the Catholic intellectual Adolf Keller wrote: “a superhuman giant, claiming not only obedience, but confidence and faith such as only a personality has the right to expect.”³²

In this conception, the state was beyond moral limitations for it was the only producer of morality. In Emilio Gentile’s coinage, communism and fascism aimed at, pursued, and institutionalized the sacralization of

²⁹ E.A. Rees, *Political Thought from Machiavelli to Stalin: Revolutionary Machiavellism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 74.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 235–36.

³¹ T.H. Rigby, “Introduction. Political Legitimacy, Weber and Communist Mono-organisational Systems,” in *Political Legitimation in Communist States*, ed. T.H. Rigby and F. Feher (London: Macmillan, 1982), 5.

³² Cited in E. Gentile and R. Mallett, “The Sacralisation of Politics. Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 1 (2000): 46.

politics.³³ The state became the supreme and absolute value within the framework of an eschatological doctrine of the revolution. Therefore, the horrors that defined the past century were thus possible because of a “moral inversion”: “the state’s crimes explicable not as crimes but as necessary precautions to prevent greater injustice.”³⁴ Through the cult of absolute unity along the path to salvation by knowledge of history, both communism and fascism produced a new social and political project centered on purifying the body of the communities that fell prey to these ideological spells. Molotov’s unforgettable evaluation of the Great Terror goes at great length in exemplifying the new dynamic between power and morality: “of course there were excesses, but all was permissible, to my mind, for the sake of the main objective—keeping state power! . . . Our mistakes, including the crude mistakes, were justified.”³⁵ To paraphrase Gaetano Salvemini, both fascism and communism decided they have found the key to happiness, virtue, and infallibility, consequently being prepared to kill in the process of its application upon specific societies.

Mobilization Between Citizenship and Excision

Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler would not have been able to achieve their goals had they not known how to regiment, mobilize, and include large social strata in their efforts. Whereas Bolshevism was primarily a repressive ideocratic dictatorship, Nazism was, at least for its first years in power, a consensus dictatorship. Both represented the triumph of ideological constructs rooted in scientism, organicism, historicism. For Lenin, class struggle was the ultimate justification for the ruthless persecutions of aristocrats, priests, wealthy peasants etc. The demonization of the enemy started basically with Lenin, as clearly exposed by Gellately in agreement with Richard Pipes. This does not mean that Nazism was

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Overy, *The Dictators*, 303–6.

³⁵ *Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev*, edited with an introduction and notes by A. Resis (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 2007), 262, 270.

simply a response to Bolshevism, a panic-ridden reaction to an external cause. The ideological roots of Hitler's politics were endogenous. There was a proto-fascist tradition in Germany as well as in France.³⁶

At a certain moment, Stalinism incorporated the motifs and symbols of the ultra-nationalist right and became, as Alexander Yakovlev and Robert C. Tucker have argued, a "Bolshevism of the extreme right."³⁷ This was not simply the expression of Stalin's idiosyncrasies. Zhadanovism (the anticosmopolitan campaigns), the secret pogrom of the early 1950s, the Slansky affair, were part and parcel of the (il)logic of mature Stalinism.³⁸ Ironically, they represented a victory of sorts of Nazism over its main ideological rival. As Martin Amis pointed out, the anti-Jewish terror planned by Stalin "would have modeled itself on the older Bolshevik idea or tactic of inciting one class to destroy another. It would have resembled the Red Terror of 1918 with the Jews very approximately in the role of the bourgeoisie."³⁹ Eric van Ree correctly stressed that the real ideological originality of mature Stalinism was the synthesis nation and class and between two main goals, national development and world communism.⁴⁰ The process of state building in the Soviet Union produced un-Marxist results. Or, following Ken Jowitt and Terry Martin, Stalinism talked about modernization but it practiced neotraditionalism.

³⁶ Z. Sternhell, *Neither Left Nor Right: Fascist Ideology in France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

³⁷ R.C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941* (New York: Norton, 1990). See also V. Tismaneanu, "Diabolical Pedagogy and the (Il)logic of Stalinism in Eastern Europe," in *Stalinism Revisited: The Establishment of Communist Regimes in East-Central Europe*, ed. V. Tismaneanu (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009), 25–49.

³⁸ J. Rubenstein and V.P. Naumov, *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

³⁹ M. Amis, *Koba the Dread: Laughter and the Twenty Million* (New York: Hyperion, 2002), 220.

⁴⁰ E. van Ree, "Stalin as Marxist: the Western Roots of Stalin's Russification of Marxism," in *Stalin: A New History*, ed. S. Davies and J. Harris (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 159–80. See my notion of "national-Stalinism" in V. Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 18–36.

Both Stalinism and Nazism looked for “objective enemies” and operated with notions of collective, even genetical guilt. Similar to Nazi Germany, in Stalinism citizenship rights increasingly morphed into a boundary between belonging and criminalization, between “the national self and the enemy others,” an indicator of friends and foes. The principle of the elect that was at the core of the Leninist theory of the historical subject realizing Utopia was reflected in citizenship laws. As Golfo Alexopoulos stated, “in the Soviet Union, there were citizens and there were citizens.”⁴¹ Those deemed unfit and unworthy to hold and exercise the rights assigned to the Soviet body politic were disenfranchised, which in case of communist polities equaled de facto denaturalization and statelessness.

Jowitt argued that “the critical issue facing Leninist regimes was citizenship. The political individuation of an article potential citizenry treated contemptuously by an inclusive (not democratic), neotraditional (not modernized) Leninist polity was the cause of Leninist breakdown.”⁴² Moreover, during certain periods in the evolution of the Soviet regimes, such rightlessness became an inherited disease. Under Stalin, “The deprivation of rights extended to entire kin groups, as family units were often punished collectively. The Stalinist state viewed enemies of various kinds as defined by ties of kinship; thus entire families lost their rights as a group. Class enemies (Nepmen, traders, kulaks, *lishentsy*) and so-called ‘enemies of the people,’ as well as enemy nations (Germans, Poles, Koreans, Greeks, Chinese)—both Soviet citizens and foreign subjects—were rounded up as kin groups. The disloyalty of the fathers was thought to be passed down to the sons. Both rightlessness and statelessness became inherited traits.”⁴³

⁴¹ G. Alexopoulos, “Soviet Citizenship, More or Less Rights, Emotions, and States of Civic Belonging,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 487–528. According to Alexopoulos: “The practice of giving and taking rights for political purposes produced a highly fragmented society where individuals experienced different and unstable states of civic belonging” (490).

⁴² See K. Jowitt, “Weber, Trotsky and Holmes on the Study of Leninist Regimes,” *Journal of International Affairs* 45 (2001): 44.

⁴³ Alexopoulos, “Soviet Citizenship,” 521. It should be noted here that Alexopoulos makes this statement in agreement with Weitz’s racialization thesis.

Obviously, the Bolshevik vision stigmatized political “sins,”⁴⁴ whereas the Nazi Weltanschauung reified biological distinctions. In his enormously significant toast of November 7, 1937, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Bolshevik coup, as recorded by the Comintern leader Georgi Dimitrov, and in his diary, a speech meant to be known only by the top party and NKVD elite, Stalin said:

whoever attempts to destroy the unity of the socialist state, whoever seeks the separation of any of its parts or nationalities—that man is an enemy, a sworn enemy of the peoples of the USSR. And we will destroy each and every such enemy, even if was an old Bolshevik; we will destroy all his kin, his family. We will mercilessly destroy anyone who, by his deeds or his thoughts,—yes, his thoughts—threatens the unity of the socialist state. To the complete destruction of all enemies, themselves and their kin! (Approving exclamations: To the great Stalin!).⁴⁵

The crux of the matter was that in the Soviet Union (and this was a model for other communist regimes) the population was organized based on criteria of exclusion and disenfranchisement according to the ideological imperatives and developmental tasks set up by the party line. Historian Eric Weitz went as far as using concept of “racialization” in order to accentuate radicalization of the manner in which population categories were subjected to terror with direct consequences regarding their imprisonment, execution, deportation, and so on: “it helps capture the malleability of assigned identities, how groups perceived as nations or classes can, in specific historical circumstances, come to be viewed as so utterly distinct from the dominant groups that only the term race captures the immense divide that is created. And the term also captures how, in different circumstances, populations can become ‘de-racialized,’ as happened officially to many of the

⁴⁴ Political sins however could rapidly “ethnicized” under Stalin as in the case of the cleansing of “enemy nations.” For example, see Zaslavsky, *Class Cleansing*; T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); N. Naimark, *Stalin’s Genocides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); and T. Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

⁴⁵ *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1943–1949*, introduction and edited by I. Banac (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 65.

purged nationalities after Josef Stalin's death."⁴⁶ Weitz's approach is just another entry on the long list of scholars who attempted to make sense of what N. Werth dubbed "the cycles of violence" that became the norm in the Soviet Union.

The Party as Instrument of Rule

What distinguished the Stalinist Soviet polity from that of Nazi Germany was the greater role of the Party apparatus in the former. Generally speaking, the myth of the Party, more than the myth of the leader explains the longevity and endurance of the Leninist project. The fascists, while invoking the commands of historical providence, invested the ultimate center of power less in the institution, but rather in the infallible genius of the leader. The party mattered, but there was not the same type of institutional charismatic magnet that Leninist formations represented, particularly in the case of Nazi Germany. For example, Robert Gellately noted that Hitler envied Stalin for having been able to place political officers as ideological watchdogs in the army. When he maintained that cadres decided everything, Stalin really meant it (with him being the ultimate arbiter of promotions and emotions): "A great deal is said about great leaders. But a cause is never won unless the right conditions exist. And the main thing here is the middle cadres. . . . They are the ones who choose the leader, explain our positions to the masses, and ensure the success of our cause. They don't try to climb above their station; you don't even notice them. . . . Generals can do nothing without a good officer corps."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ E.D. Weitz, "On Certainties and Ambivalences: Reply to My Critics," *Slavic Review* 61 (2002): 63. See the other contributions to the debate stirred by Weitz's earlier article, "Racial Politics Without the Concept of Race: Reevaluating Ethnic and National Purges," *Slavic Review* 61 (2002): 1–29. He received replies from F. Hirsch, "Race Without the Practice of Racial Politics," *Slavic Review* 61 (2002): 30–43; A. Weiner, "Nothing but Certainty," *Slavic Review*, *Slavic Review* 61 (2002): 44–53; and A. Lemon, "Without a 'Concept'? Race as Discursive Practice," *Slavic Review* 61 (2002): 54–61. P. Fritzsche offered interesting comments to Weitz's approach in "Genocide and Global Discourse," *German History* 23 (2005): 96–III.

⁴⁷ *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, 65–6. For fascinating details regarding the publication of Dimitrov's diary as well as of other essential books in the Yale University Press series

True, Lenin was not the embodiment of the Party bureaucracy. The Leninist project, exacerbated by Stalin, meant a continuous aggression of the party-state against all social groups, including the much-acclaimed proletariat and its party.

Mass mobilization and fear were not mutually exclusive, and millions of ordinary citizens became involved in the bloody dramaturgy of hysteria and persecution.⁴⁸ David Priestland emphasized that the specific dynamics of the Bolshevik regime under Stalin were the result of a similar ideological context as of Lenin's years at the helm of the Bolshevik Party. Stalin had to permanently agonize about finding the right combination between "proletarian consciousness as a vital force in history and politics," science-driven progress, and the vision of a society/world structured according to class origin.⁴⁹ By the late 1940s, Stalin became increasingly obsessed with the ideological revitalization of the Soviet polity. In his view, the Party and the socialist citizenry had to enrich Marxism-Leninism through the practice of building socialism. In 1938 he declared that "after all, how did theory develop? On the basis of a generalization of experience. How does experience originate? Either in practice in a laboratory or in practice among the masses. People are also a laboratory."⁵⁰ A decade later, he would add, "Marxism cannot help but be enriched by new experience, by new knowledge; consequently, its individual formulas and conclusions must change with the passing of time, must be replaced by new formulas and conclusions corresponding to new historical tasks."⁵¹ At the height of his paranoia, Stalin kept searching for ways to refuel the Party's "heroic mission."

Annals of Communism, see J. Brent, *Inside the Stalin Archives: Discovering the New Russia* (New York: Atlas, 2008).

⁴⁸ See W.Z. Goldman, *Terror and Democracy in the Age of Stalin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴⁹ D. Priestland, *Stalinism and the Politics of Mobilization*, 37–47.

⁵⁰ E. van Ree, "Stalin as a Marxist," 281.

⁵¹ E. Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 129.

The Totalitarian Order: Progress by Homogenization

Communism and fascism shared the similar obsession with permanently moving forward in order to avoid the damning specter of stagnation. Mao once stated that “our revolutions are like battles. After a victory, we must at once put forward a new task. In this way, cadres and the masses will forever be filled with revolutionary fervor instead of conceit.”⁵² Eugen Weber proposed a diagnosis for fascism along the same clinical fact sheet: “the fascist must move forward all the time; but just because precise objectives are lacking he can never stop, and every goal attained is but a stage on the continuous treadmill of the future he claims to construct, of the national destiny he claims to fulfill.”⁵³ On the path to permanent transformation, both communism and fascism engineered (or better said aimed at) an extinction of the individual by means of inventing equally binding criteria of faith, loyalty, and status crystallized into a master political myth. Indeed, this defines the religiousness of a collective existence—“quand on met toutes les ressources de l’esprit, toutes les soumissions de la volonté, toutes les ardeurs du fanatisme au service d’une cause ou d’un être qui devient le but et le guide des pensées et des actions” (when one subjects all resources of the spirit, all the will’s submissions, all the ardors of fanaticism to a cause or a being that become the goal and the guide of all thoughts and actions).⁵⁴

Both Stalinism and Nazism functioned on the perverted logic of enhancing and valuing the need for social integration and communal belonging through the exclusion of specific others. Richard Overy advanced an excellent characterization based on this dynamic; the two regimes were “all holistic dictatorships.” They relied on “creating complicity, just as they operate by isolating and destroying a chosen minority, whose terrorized status confirms the rational desire of the rest to be included and protected.”⁵⁵ Their legitimacy was based on a

⁵² Ibid., 421.

⁵³ E. Weber, *Varieties of History* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1964), 78.

⁵⁴ Quoted in E. Gentile and Mallett, “The Sacralisation of Politics,” 28–29.

⁵⁵ Overy, *The Dictators*, 650.

synthesis between coercion and consent. In this sense, totalitarianism was embodied by the masses, who “gave life and direction to it.”⁵⁶ Both the Soviet Union and Germany went through massive social and political tumults in the aftermath of World War I. By the time Stalin and Hitler came into power there was indeed “a wide popular consensus for a politics without conflict and a society without divisions.”⁵⁷ In the process of reestablishing and recreating social order, these states proved to be both repressive and tutelary. Their project of modernization was inherently one of “homogenizing unambiguity” (Jörg Baberowski and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel). Society was structured according to categories such as class, race, nationality, gender each of them with specific consequences on the axis inclusion-exclusion for the individuals to whom they were attributed. Both the Soviet Union (and later East European countries) and Germany were realigned demographically, geographically, and biologically according to imagined projects of the perfect citizenry.

The developmental and exterminist metaphors adopted and implemented by the two dictators and their power apparatuses became the life framework for the subject population, the groundwork for the reinvention of both individual and collective identities. The macro-strategies of the state suffered a process of translation and adaptation in the form of micro-strategies of the individual. Socialization turned into political practice, into the effort to bridge “what one does with what s/he thinks and says about what s/he does.” The political practice was the area where the citizen came to terms with the “deliberatively ideological” environment one lived in.⁵⁸ Under the circumstances, terror could be used to generally refer to “a complex sensibility of existential dislocation that affects the population broadly under totalitarian rule.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ F. Patrikeeff, “Stalinism, Totalitarian Society and the Politics of ‘Perfect Control,’” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 4 (2003): 40.

⁵⁷ Overy, *The Dictators*, 306.

⁵⁸ S. Fitzpatrick, “Politics as Practice: Thoughts on a New Soviet Political History,” *Kritika: Extrapolations in Russian and Eurasia History* 5 (2004): 27–54.

⁵⁹ M. Halberstam, “Hannah Arendt on the Totalitarian Sublime and Its Promise of Freedom,” in *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, ed. S.E. Aschheim (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 122.

Stalinism and Nazism were “states of terror” because they tried to achieve homogenization by creating “battle communities” within which already existent differences were the subject of grotesque public dramatization and the object of elimination through “capillary organization” and constant mobilization. Collective and individual dislocation under conditions of state mobilization and state violence generated new social realities that sustained both genocide and a sense of belonging and unity in “fractured (German) and quicksand (Soviet) societies.” Both of them were “extreme consequences of secular humanism” responding to the disillusionment and despair brought upon by the traumatic experience of the Great War. Fascism and communism, as political movements, were resolutions to a painfully and universally felt “sense-making crisis” throughout Europe.

Conclusion: From Total Politics to Apostasy

Communism and fascism were revolutionary ideologies/movements, meant to destroy the status quo (the bourgeois order) and its enshrined values. Both movements proclaimed the leading role of a community of chosen individuals grouped within the Party. Both detested bourgeois values and liberal democracy. One carried to an extreme a certain Enlightenment universalism, the other made an absolute out of racial particularism. Lenin did not nourish xenophobic propensities, but Stalin did. At the end of his life, he behaved like a rabid anti-Semite and prepared horrific pogroms. Upon deciding that ethnic Russians were or had to be “the primary executors and beneficiaries of Soviet cultural and cadre policies,” Stalin also identified those who fell to the periphery or even outside of the system. In other words, his anti-Semitism was “part and parcel of the russocentric redefinition of the politico-ideological system of the USSR.”⁶⁰ Both Hitler and Stalin used propaganda to dehumanize their enemies: the Judeo-Bolsheviks, the Trotskyites, and the Zionists.

⁶⁰ A. Umland, “Stalin’s Russocentrism in Historical and International Context,” *Nationalities Papers* 38 (2010): 742–43.

To conclude: it is not possible anymore to maintain and defend the image of a relatively benign Lenin whose ideas were viciously distorted by a sociopath named Stalin. In fact, as Gellately bluntly and unequivocally repudiated any apologetic approach to Lenin. He portrays Lenin as “a heartless and ambitious individual who was self-righteous in claiming to know what was good for “humanity,” brutal in his attempt to subject his own people to radical social transformation, and convinced he held the key to the eventual overthrow of global capitalism and the establishment of world Communism.”⁶¹ Furthermore, it is hard not to agree with the Gellately when he writes: “Lenin introduced Soviet Communism, complete with new secret police and concentration camps. . . . Once in power, Lenin enthusiastically hunted down anyone who did not fit in or who opposed the new regime, and he introduced the Communist Party purges that periodically called forth nationwide witch hunts. . . . Lenin did not become dictator simply by taking on the mantle of chairman of Sovnarkom (in effect its premier). Rather, he made his will prevail by his control of the great Marxist texts and perhaps above all by his ferocity.”⁶²

Lenin created the praxis of the voluntarism and Manichaeism necessary for the success of revolutionary action. His impact on Marxism and his responsibility for the ethical abyss and for the immense human sacrifice generated by communism in the twentieth century is, I think, superbly expressed by the following formulation: “Marxism brought history out of its infant stages, out of its speechless moments, and gave it a soundtrack. . . . Lenin discovered that history spoke the language of dialectical materialism. But one needs an announcer to broadcast the script.” And, that radio was Radio-Moscow with the single voice of the CPSU(b). To continue along this argument, only when the irradiating ideological center “ceased to be decipherable for the Marxist decoders” was possible for “the contract of silence” over the criminality of Bolshevism to be broken. Only then the emancipation from Diamat could gain traction in the intellectual and political history of Marxism in Europe.⁶³

⁶¹ Gellately, *Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler*, 579.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 581.

⁶³ I am developing a point made by Denis Hollier and Betsy Wing in their article “Desperanto,” *New German Critique: Legacies of Antifascism* 67 (1996): 19–31. They discuss

Ironically, it was precisely the disenchanted return to “the great Marxist texts,” a forgotten and betrayed tradition that allowed successive waves of revisionist de-Stalinization rock the boat of the utopian party-state. There was no such tradition in the Nazi experience. There was no original, presumably humanist Holy Writ for disillusioned National Socialists to dream of resurrecting. In my view, here lies the capital distinction between the two horrendous experiences. Such a development, I argue, would have been unthinkable under the Nazi regime: there was no humanist original project, no enlightened reservoir of betrayed libertarian hopes to be invoked against the abominations of Hitlerism. I maintain that a Khrushchev-style mortal blow to the defunct leader’s mystical cult was barely imaginable in a post-Hitler Germany. The impact of Marxist revisionism and critical intellectuals can barely be overestimated. The adventure of revisionism led these intellectuals beyond the once-worshipped paradigm, critical Marxism turned into post-Marxism and, even, to liberal anti-Marxism. From within, many a times by true believers, Leninism was found wanting in terms of its most powerful ambition, to respond in a positively engaging way to the challenges of democratic modernity.

Nikita Khrushchev’s fulminating attack on Stalinism at the 20th Congress of the CPSU in February 1956 opened the door to the realization that all the Stalinist theoretical and political constructions had been denounced as a horrible hoax: the illusions could no longer cover the squalid reality. “Revisionism,” a term coined by neo-Stalinist orthodoxes to stigmatize critical currents of thought and the main adversary encountered by ruling bureaucrats since the factional struggles of the mid- and late 1920s, became the main foe of the neo-Stalinist ideological construct.⁶⁴ Consequently, the political radicalization (de-Bolshevization) of the East European intellectuals coincided with—and

the cases of dissident anti-fascists (to varying degrees from one individual to the other), such as Walter Benjamin, Georges Bataille, Ernest Hemingway, Andre Malraux, and their reaction to the illogic and senselessness of the late 1930s trials in Moscow, implicitly pointing out their inevitable disenchantment and awakening (especially pages 22 and 26).

⁶⁴ Two classics on the topic of Marxist revisionism in Eastern Europe are L. Labedz, ed., *Revisionism: Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas* (New York: Praeger 1962) and W. Leonhard, *Three Faces of Marxism: the Political Concepts of Soviet Ideology, Maoism, and Humanist Marxism* (New York: Paragon Books, 1979).

was catalyzed by—the wave of liberalization touched off by Nikita Khrushchev's historical revelations.⁶⁵ The yearning for a moral reform of communism was the basic motivation for the neo-Marxist revival in Eastern Europe.

The intellectuals' rebellion against totalitarian controls became a massive threat to the endurance of Soviet-type regimes. The dubious legitimacy of these governments was questioned by critics who could not be accused of belonging to the defeated social classes. With their outspoken advocacy of humanism and democracy, they contributed to the erosion of the apparent monolithic consensus. Moreover, as historian Vladislav Zubok argued, "the ethos of educated civic participation, resistance to the immorality of the communist regime, and belief in humane socialism was a feature common to the efforts of Russian, Polish, and Czech reformers and liberal-minded people of culture."⁶⁶ This growing common ground of civic empowerment and emancipation became most obvious in 1968 and later in the echoes of the dissident movement in Western Europe. Apostasy appeared once the ideological hubris of communist regimes was denounced from within. Leninism, in contrast to fascism, ultimately collapsed in Europe because it lost its hierocratic credentials.

⁶⁵ W. Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002).

⁶⁶ Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 561–62.

From Facts to Words

From Militia Party to Fascist Totalitarianism

EMILIO GENTILE

Plato counted the farmer-philosopher Myson of Chen among the Seven Sages of Greece, and the Oracle of Delphi declared him one among the wisest of all Greeks. Yet very few traces of his thought survive. Among these rare fragments, one confirms his wisdom: “We should not investigate facts by the light of words, but words by the light of facts.”

More than to philosophers, Myson’s maxim ought to be suited to historians, who study the genesis and development of past human experiences, which almost always entail new words and concepts—hence new arguments. These new words are used by the people directly affected in order to name and describe their experiences, and later to pass them down to posterity.

The facts and words handed down by history are the subject of the research and interpretation of historians. But historians do not always concur in their views about past experiences, or in their definition of the meanings of the concepts associated with them.

One of the most recent, universally known cases revolves around the word “fascism.”¹ The term originated in Italy from a political movement whose life began, developed and ended between 1919 and 1945. During the same span of time, the word “fascism” was applied

¹ This chapter draws on the author’s previous writings on the subject. See, particularly, E. Gentile, *Fascismo e anti-fascismo: I partiti italiani fra le due guerre* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2000); E. Gentile, *Fascismo. Storia e interpretazione* (Rome, Bari: Laterza, 2003); E. Gentile, *La via italiana al totalitarismo: Il partito e lo Stato nel regime fascista* (Rome: Carocci, 2008); E. Gentile, “Violenza e milizia nel fascismo: Alle origini del totalitarismo in Italia,” in *Alfredo Rocco: dalla crisi del parlamentarismo alla costruzione dello Stato nuovo*, ed. F. Lanchester, E. Gentile and A. Tarquini (Rome: Carocci, 2010), 39–66.

to other political movements born outside Italy in the interwar years. Later, from 1945 to the present, it was extended to various movements, ideologies, regimes, ways of thinking, customs, and behaviors, spread all over the world, and which sometimes predate the advent of fascism in Italy by many years. As the word was overused, its meaning was stretched to the point of losing all consistency and any relation to the historical phenomenon from which it originated.²

The same fate awaited two other new words, “totalitarian” and “totalitarianism,” which made their appearance in history after fascism ascended to power at the end of 1922. The terms were coined between 1923 and 1925 to define the fascist party’s nature and novelty, its organization, its conduct, and the new political regime it produced. After 1926, “totalitarianism” was used to define other political regimes resembling fascist totalitarianism in their organization and methods of power, like Soviet Communism and National Socialism. Then, starting in 1945, “totalitarianism” too was overused, and tacked onto all manners of movements, regimes, ideologies, mentalities, and behaviors, until its original historical meaning and its connection to the “facts” from which it originated were lost.

Almost ninety years have elapsed since fascism and totalitarianism arose in history. At least until the early 1950s, the association between the two was considered obvious. Since then, however, there have been scholars—lacking both an adequate knowledge of the history of fascism and of the origins of totalitarianism—who have denied this association. Like the philosopher Hannah Arendt in 1951, these scholars have claimed that fascism was not totalitarian, that speaking of “fascist totalitarianism” is pointless, and that the concept of totalitarianism should only be applied to Stalinism and National Socialism.³ Others have maintained that these two regimes may not be termed totalitarian either, thus reaching the conclusion that totalitarianism has never existed, and that as a result its very concept is useless.⁴ An extreme example of this denial was the proposal, made in 1968 in an authoritative encyclopedia of social sciences, to ban the concept of

² E. Gentile, *Fascismo: Storia e interpretazione*, 54f.

³ E. Gentile, *La via italiana al totalitarismo*, 315f.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 309–10.

totalitarianism from historiography and social sciences.⁵ That same year, a similar proposal was made for the term “fascism,” which mentioned the excessive use of the word.⁶

The best I can tell through my research, controversies surrounding a concept rooted in historical fact have not led scholars to conclude that it should be banned from historiography and social sciences. Further, scholars have not advocated that a concept should be censured only because it has been misused, or because they have not reached a unanimous definition for it. If such a condition were sufficient to suggest that a historical concept be banned, many other, equally controversial and overused concepts should be excluded from historiography and social sciences, like despotism, dictatorship, freedom, revolution, feudalism, renaissance, capitalism, democracy, republic, Bonapartism, liberalism, communism, socialism, conservatism, and radicalism. The list could go on to include all the other -isms of history. The potential consequences of such a “conceptual denial” for historiography are easy to imagine.

Fascism and Totalitarianism

In reality, the rejection of the concept of totalitarianism and, even more so, its dissociation from fascism are for the most part the consequence of an insufficient knowledge of the historical origins of totalitarianism and its genetic link with fascism. This deficiency lasted from the 1950s almost to the end of the twentieth century, as proven, for example, by the brief considerations that even a gifted historian like Eric J. Hobsbawm provided on totalitarianism in his history of the “short century”: “Until [1945] the term ‘totalitarianism,’ originally invented as a description or self-description of Italian Fascism, was applied virtually only to such regimes.” The historian goes on to reiterate his message on the non-totalitarian character of the Soviet system: “Brutal and dictatorial though it was, the Soviet system was not ‘totalitarian,’ a term which became popular among critics of communism after the

⁵ H.J. Spiro, “Totalitarianism,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. D.L. Sills, vol. 16 (London: Macmillan, 1968), 112.

⁶ S.J. Woolf, ed., *European Fascism* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), 1.

Second World War, having been invented in the 1920s by Italian fascism to describe its objects. Hitherto it had been used almost exclusively to criticize both it and German National Socialism.”⁷

Hobsbawm’s accounts are not accurate. Fascism did not invent the word “totalitarian.” It was antifascists who minted “totalitarian” and “totalitarianism” a few months after fascism’s ascent to power, and they did so to define what fascism was—as well as what it was doing—as a party and government. It is also not true that “totalitarian” was used, at first, “almost exclusively” to criticize fascism and National Socialism, for, starting in the 1930s, it was used in America and in Europe (with the exception of the Soviet Union) to describe and criticize the communist regime, too. It was used particularly to launch the comparative study on the new single-party regimes born in the interwar period.⁸

The example provided above is enough to show the extent of confusion and how many nonnegligible errors of fact and judgment have derived from an insufficient knowledge of the historical origins of the concept of totalitarianism, which have ultimately led to demands that the concept itself be banned from historiography and social sciences.

Luckily, such antihistorical demands have been rejected by history itself. In its unfolding, history has produced a renewed use of the concept of totalitarianism, both in historiography and in social sciences. The simultaneous publishing of my own book *La via italiana al totalitarismo* and of Victor Zaslavsky’s 1995 volume *Storia del sistema sovietico* may be seen as belonging to this revival.⁹ Zaslavsky valued the concept

⁷ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes* (London: Michael Joseph, 1995), 112, 393.

⁸ A. Gleason, *Totalitarianism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁹ E. Gentile, *La via italiana al totalitarismo*, and V. Zaslavsky, *Storia del sistema sovietico: L’ascesa, la stabilità, il crollo* (Rome: Carocci, 1995). In the years leading up to the publication of these two books, I had several opportunities to discuss the concept of totalitarianism with Victor Zaslavsky and Elena Aga-Rossi, and we agreed on its importance, though not entirely on its definition, for the interpretation of fascism and Soviet communism. An echo of our conversations may be found in E. Aga-Rossi, “La politica estera e l’Impero,” in *Storia d’Italia*, ed. G. Sabatucci and V. Vidotto, vol. 4 (Rome: Laterza, 1997), 247. Projects for the two books stemmed from those discussions: at the time, I was editing a series of volumes on contemporary history for Carocci. I asked Victor to write a book on the Soviet totalitarian system, and he was happy to oblige. The two volumes came out in February and in March 1995.

of totalitarianism as useful for the interpretation of the Soviet system: “The historical uncertainties on the use of the concept of totalitarianism must not eclipse its great utility for the study of the socio-political systems of the 20th century.”¹⁰ The book on “the Italian path to totalitarianism” resulted from new research on the relationships between party and state in the fascist regime, and presented the interpretation of fascism as a totalitarian experiment. It proposed a re-elaboration of the concept of totalitarianism closer to its original historical meaning, subsequently developed in other research and critical works.¹¹

The renewed use of the concept of totalitarianism and the new historiography on fascism as a totalitarian experiment were met with some resistance. In the case of fascism, resistance came from those who—with orthodox zeal and hostility to dissenting opinions—still refer to Hannah Arendt’s assessment of fascism, though its unreliability (due to her insufficient knowledge of fascism, as well as to the contradictions and inconsistencies in her theory of totalitarianism) has been amply proven.¹² Produced by a sort of Pavlovian reflex at the mere mention of fascist totalitarianism, this resistance is usually accompanied by an automatic reiteration of conventional objections derived from a softened representation of fascism as an almost involuntary and improvised dictatorship, characterized by some violence and cruelty, but rather good-natured and careless. (According to these objections, fascism was not totalitarian because mass terror was absent from Italy, as were concentration and extermination camps, while in their place stood the Church, the monarchy, the army, capitalists, Benedetto Croce, “forced vacations” and not execution for the enemies of the regime, cultural freedom for anti-fascists protected by the philosopher Giovanni Gentile, and so forth.) Often, this resistance to the renewed

¹⁰ Zaslavsky, *Storia del sistema sovietico*, 18–19.

¹¹ E. Gentile, *Fascismo*, 63f.; E. Gentile, *La via italiana al totalitarismo*, 161f.; E. Gentile, “Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation”, in *Fascism, Totalitarismo and Political Religion*, ed. R. Griffin (London: Routledge, 2005), 32f.

¹² P. Pombeni, *Demagogia e tirannide* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1984), 441–42; S. Lupo, *Il fascismo: La politica di un regime totalitario* (Rome: Donzelli, 2000), 27–28; E. Gentile, *La vita italiana al totalitarismo*, 315–39.

use of the concept of totalitarianism as applied to fascism has paradoxical effects. For instance, there are detailed historical studies on the fascist party that corroborate the interpretation of fascism as a totalitarian experiment, although their authors maintain a cautious silence on this interpretation.¹³ Even more ironic is the case of those scholars who, while opposing the interpretation of fascism as a totalitarian experiment, unwittingly echo its fundamental arguments, such as the abuse of power carried out by the fascist party to the detriment of the state, its Caesarism, and the regimentation of the population in a party-controlled organizational network. This is the case of those scholars who deny that the fascist state was totalitarian—or even fascist—and still claim that, “strictly speaking, it was the party, the movement, or fascism in itself, that were totalitarian, not the state, which the party, the movement, or fascism, seized.”¹⁴ To be sure, the statement that fascism seized the state corresponds, almost literally, with the interpretation of fascism as a totalitarian experiment.¹⁵

¹³ For example, see L. Di Nucci, *Lo Stato-partito del fascismo: Genesi, evoluzione e crisi, 1919–1945* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009), 7–13.

¹⁴ These words belong to S. Cassese, *Lo Stato fascista* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 31. Even more consistent with the interpretation of fascism as a totalitarian experiment is the author's take on the “fascist state” (the expression is his own) as favoring associations: “The fascist state was a great promoter of associations. From a very young age to the time of their death, regardless of their profession or occupation, not a moment goes by when Italians are not enrolled in associations that include sons of the she-wolf, members of the Italian Fascist Youth Movement, avant-gardists, university students, freelance professionals, and practitioners of the arts and crafts. Above it all is the Fascist Party, viewed as ‘the necessary link between the state and the people.’ Thus, the state does not merely establish obligations and prohibitions, but it imposes itself on society in other ways, too, by promoting, organizing, and regulating associations with the double characteristic of being exclusive and of being set up, ordered and directed from above” (Cassese, 57). Once again, it would be hard to find words more suited to describe one of the fundamental aspects of the fascist totalitarian experiment.

¹⁵ Following Arendt's judgment and the historiography on fascism of the 1960s, Cassese reiterates that the fascist state was not totalitarian, but authoritarian, and ultimately concludes that there was no fascist state at all. Therefore, he rejects the interpretation of fascism as a totalitarian experiment, without addressing the merits of the historical knowledge that supports it, while revealing a poor command (or indeed a merely bibliographic knowledge) of the works that expound it. For example, it seems peculiar that anyone citing *La via italiana al totalitarismo* should call the 150-odd pages the book devotes to commentators and scholars of fascist totalitarianism, which to this

Opposition by those scholars who admit the legitimacy of fascist totalitarianism with regard to only ideology, theory, and ambitions of fascism—which proclaimed itself totalitarian but supposedly never succeeded in becoming totalitarian in the ways Stalinist communism and National Socialism did—is less resolute. However, on this matter, it stands to be pointed out that the arguments used to deny the reality of fascist totalitarianism were also used to claim that Stalinism and National Socialism were never fully totalitarian either.

According to the historian Gordon Graig, Hitler's Germany was not a totalitarian state, nor was it a police state, if not "in a limited measure": "Except for the Jews, toward whom Hitler had an obsessive hatred, and former and potential dissidents, and homosexuals and Gypsies, most people, at least until the war years, remained surprisingly unrestrained by state control, and even those who were plotting to overthrow the regime found it relatively easy to travel abroad in pursuit of assistance. Hitler rarely used the word "total" and denied that he wanted to be a dictator."¹⁶

As to Stalinism, the most resolute denial of its nature as a totalitarian regime came from Hobsbawm, who reached this conclusion following this definition of totalitarianism: "An all-embracing centralized system which not only imposed total physical control over its population but, by means of its monopoly of propaganda and education, actually succeeded in getting its people to internalize its values." According to Hobsbawm, this totalitarianism was "surely the goal Stalin would have wanted to achieve, though it would have outraged Lenin and other Old Bolsheviks, not to mention Marx." Yet it remained a goal that Stalin was never able to reach: "[The Soviet System] did not exercise effective 'thought control,' let alone ensure 'thought conversion,' but in fact depoliticized the citizenry to an astonishing degree." Consequently, the historian concludes, the Soviet system was not totalitarian, and this "throws considerable doubt on the usefulness of the term."¹⁷

day constitute the longest available critical review of the subject, "a brief historical analysis of historiography on fascist totalitarianism" (Cassese, 27).

¹⁶ G. Graig, "Man of the People?" *The New York Review of Books*, no. 18, 1997.

¹⁷ Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 393–94.

Adopting a similar approach—that is, investigating facts by the light of arguments—doubts could easily arise on the utility of any historical concept. For instance, if we define democracy as “a political system in which the entire population exercises power,” we might say that this is the goal that proponents of democracy wanted to achieve, but have never really been able to reach. Thus, we might conclude that “this casts serious doubts on the utility of the term.”

In order to appreciate the value of a concept from a historical point of view, rather than investigating facts by the light of words, it would be wiser to investigate words by the light of the facts from which those words originated, to verify their meaning. This was the method followed by the historian Jens Petersen in 1975, as he carried out the first research on the birth of the concept of totalitarianism.¹⁸ He traced the first appearance of the term “totalitarian” back to 1923 Italy, in the writings of the antifascist liberal Giovanni Amendola, and followed its diffusion in anti-fascist political journalism up to 1925, when fascists appropriated the word and started using it as an attribute to define their politics.¹⁹

The “fact” from which the word “totalitarianism” originated in 1923 was the new reality of a party with a military organization, a militia party. The latter established itself relying on the violence of its squads to crush its political opponents, which it treated like enemies. It used violence to open a path that would lead to government.²⁰ The “fact,” with these characteristics, already existed as such when anti-fascists invented the word “totalitarian” to define it.

¹⁸ J. Petersen, “La nascita del concetto di ‘stato totalitario’ in Italia,” *Annali dell’Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento* I (1975): 143–68. That same year, another book came out, E. Gentile, *Le origini dell’ideologia fascista* (Rome: Laterza, 1975), which first presented the interpretation of fascism as a totalitarian experiment.

¹⁹ M. Michaelis, “Giovanni Amendola interprete del fenomeno fascista,” *Nuova Antologia* (April–June 1986): 180–209. The essay by S. Colarizi, “La percezione del totalitarismo fascista nell’antifascismo italiano,” in *La modernità totalitaria*, ed. E. Gentile (Rome: Laterza, 2008), 23–55, is an excellent addition and development to research on the interpretation of fascist totalitarianism by antifascists, between 1922 and the early 1940s.

²⁰ E. Gentile, *Storia del partito fascista: 1919–1922. Movimento e Milizia* (Rome: Laterza, 1987).

From Militia Party to Fascist Totalitarianism

Born in 1919, fascism became an entirely new kind of party in the history of Western democracies by the end of 1921, thanks to its organization, methods of struggle, and practice of domination in cities and provinces. Yet most contemporary observers, who were surprised by its rapid and unforeseen rise, considered it a transitory phenomenon. They believed it would die down as soon as the fear of a socialist revolution, which had led the bourgeoisie and middle class to support fascist reaction, subsided.

In 1921 few recognized that fascism was not a fleeting phenomenon, and that by its very nature—that is, for its organization, methods of struggle, and mentality, all of which revolved around the practice of violence—it constituted a grave threat for the parliamentary regime's survival and the nation's future.²¹ On November 16, 1921, a few weeks after the National Fascist Party (PNF) was established, the republican magazine *La critica politica* (Political criticism) drew attention to it in an article titled “La natura del fascismo” (Fascism's Nature): “Fascism cannot be viewed as a transitory phenomenon of the current Italian crisis. It threatens the very future of the nation, its liberty, and its peace. Fascism does not tolerate dissent. It challenges its opponents' right to think, discuss, and function openly. The most hard-earned achievements of the past century hold no value for it. Italy, all of Italy, is in fascism. Not to acknowledge this, not to take off one's hat as a pennant goes by or before a fascist squad is considered a crime of lèse-majesté that can be punished with death or, in the best case, with a thrashing.” Fascists, the magazine went on, professed to have saved Italy from a Bolshevik dictatorship, but wasn't “what they were carrying out also a form of dictatorship? And what might the one they would exercise in the future—if only they managed to take over all state organs—hold in store for us? Fascist declarations on the will to seize the state were not “just words,” the magazine added before describing what fascism was and how it carried on, without focusing on what fascists said and preached:

²¹ E. Gentile, “Au commencement était la violence: Les caractères originaires du totalitarisme dans le fascisme italien,” in *Naissances du totalitarisme*, ed. P. De Lara (Paris: Cerf, 2011), 73–109.

Fascists make up a perfectly integrated armed organization—*Italy's sole armed political organization*, and the only one that still has the right to be bear arms and to arm itself. Fascists are the only individuals for whose disarmament the government has not been able or wanted to do anything. . . . The danger of a fascist attempt to take control of the state is all but far off. And no one should be under the *illusion* that such a thing might serve to establish greater freedom, or to bring principles of democracy into Italy's state system.²²

After 1921, acts of violence against municipal and provincial administrators became increasingly common to ensure the fall of local administrations. Faced with the masses mobilized by fascism, the latter were forced to resign or dismantled. In other cases, administrators resigned of their own accord for fear of retaliation or to protest against fascist terrorism. Wherever the fascist state ruled, what the Socialist Party's newspaper (*Avanti!*) called "the crime of lèse-fascism" was introduced: "Not enrolling in the combat fasces and not facing harassment are lèse-fascism; failing to dissolve one's resistance leagues and to surrender the possessions of worker organizations to the emissaries of the bourgeoisie are lèse-fascism; not reading fascist-run or fascist-approved newspapers, and wearing a red flower, a red dress, or a red ribbon are lèse-fascism."²³

Aggressions, banishments, and persecutions were methods of struggle fascists used against any party, politician, and representative of the state or government members they disliked. After targeting socialists, communists, and republicans, in 1922 fascist squads turned against the Catholics of the People's Party and against clergymen. Thus wrote some members of the People's Party of Mantua:

It used to be you couldn't reason, or talk much, with socialists. Now, under pretenses of patriotism, fascists send mercenaries recruited among the Bolsheviks not only to disturb honorable men who are going about their way tending to their interests, but also to smash their faces in. Members of the People's Party, Catholics, and veterans are fought and persecuted with the same fury used to fight against the

²² "La natura del fascismo," *La critica politica*, November 16, 1921.

²³ "I propositi di pacificazione del fascismo agrario," *Avanti!*, July 3, 1921.

Bolsheviks. In the name of liberty, you are no longer allowed to wear any emblems, including the flag, if you aren't fascist.²⁴

The priest Luigi Sturzo, the secretary of the Italian People's Party, repeatedly protested with the prime minister against the continuous acts of violence perpetrated by fascists, and decried the passivity of the police and the responsibility of the magistrates. He wrote the following words on February 24, 1922:

In cities and in the countryside, fascists resort to blackmail, intimidation, retaliation, and acts of violence, the cruelty of which sometimes reaches extraordinary proportions, against members of the People's Party. They are completely unchecked, entirely at liberty to do as they will. The authorities in charge of public order, and the RRCC, appear for the most part placidly indifferent, even as they are called on to prevent or sanction very serious offenses. The majority of suits filed against fascists, I am assured, lay dormant, piled up in the courts of law, where perhaps they await some kind of amnesty.²⁵

Yet those who realized that fascism aimed to seize power and was driven by obvious dictatorial ambitions continued to be few, even in the summer of 1922, when the militia party was throwing its weight around in most of the country with its squads. These words appeared on the democratic newspaper *La Stampa* on July 18, 1922: "Fascism is a movement that with every means possible aims to take over the state and every aspect of national life, in order to establish its absolute dictatorship. Both in the party's program and in the spirit of its leaders and followers, the essential means to this end is the complete suppression of all public and private constitutional liberties, which is like saying the destruction of the constitution and of the liberal work of the Italian unification process."²⁶

The liberal and conservative bourgeoisie still believed it was possible to tame fascists, involving them in government. Meanwhile,

²⁴ "Bolscevismo," *La scintilla*, April 16, 1922.

²⁵ E. Gentile, *Storia del partito fascista*, 580–81.

²⁶ Cited in P. Alatri, *Le origini del fascismo* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1971), 157.

most antifascist parties regarded fascism as an ephemeral movement, doomed to fade away as soon as its function as the armed guard of the bourgeois state was fulfilled. These illusions lasted even after the March on Rome, and facilitated the fascist party's action to destroy the parliamentary regime.

Finally, the militia party reached power by threatening an armed insurrection against the state. The king was compelled to entrust the task of establishing the new government to fascism's leader (*duce*), a thirty-nine-year-old man with no governing experience elected as a deputy only one year before, and who, in the lower house of parliament, could count on only thirty members from his party. For the first time in the history of European parliamentary regimes, the government of a liberal state was handed over to the leader of a militia party, which had imposed its authority with the violence of its armed organization. There is no doubt that the state's armed forces could easily have defeated fascism's paramilitary force, nipping the fascist revolution in the bud. But neither the king nor the government had the political will and the moral courage to give an order that might have saved the parliamentary regime. The fear that repressing the fascist revolution might usher in the socialist revolution and the mistaken belief that the responsibility of government would move fascism to relinquish violence and its paramilitary setup persuaded the monarchy and the liberal ruling class to let fascism into the chambers of power, under the illusion that it would ultimately contribute to restoring and strengthening the liberal state.

Even after rising to power within a parliamentary regime, fascism did not stop using violence against its opponents. Instead, it availed itself of both its old squads and the new repressive means of the liberal state. Once at the head of the government, Mussolini created a new ruling body for the National Fascist Party, the Grand Council of Fascism, which served to unify his action as prime minister with his action as fascist leader, and overlapped with the Council of Ministers. Also, Mussolini did not dismantle his squads, but reorganized them into the Voluntary Militia for National Security (MVSN), which he legalized as an instrument of his personal power. The voluntary militia's duty, publicly announced by Mussolini, was to defend the fascist revolution

against its internal enemies. "Italy is the only civilized country in which one party's militia is kept in arms and paid for by the state against another part of the country's citizens," the socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti commented.²⁷

The creation of the MVSN was decided by the new body of the PNF, the Grand Council of Fascism, founded by Mussolini immediately after the March on Rome. In the course of its first meeting, on January 12, 1923, the council formally dissolved PNF action squads, and merged them with the MVSN. This was to preserve its "essentially fascist [nature], having the purpose of protecting the inevitable and inexorable developments of the October revolution; therefore, it will preserve its symbols, its insignia, its names consecrated by victorious battles and blood spilled for the cause."²⁸

The militia's function as an "effective force for the fascist revolution" was reiterated in the council meeting of February 13. Thus, its character and purpose as a party paramilitary body, which viewed itself as external to the existing constitutional order, was confirmed.²⁹ The identification between fascist and soldier became mandatory the following April, when the Grand Council ordered that all those registered as fascists be automatically enlisted in the militia. In a subsequent session, the council arranged for "a rapid and diligent selection of Blackshirt cadres."³⁰

Italo Balbo was appointed as the general commander of the militia. A former officer of the Alpine troops in the Great War, he was 27 at the time, and boasted a number of decorations. He was an anticlerical republican, the fascist leader in Ferrara, one of the most effective organizers of squads, perhaps the main creator of fascist liturgy, and one of the strongest supporters of the March on Rome.³¹

²⁷ G. Matteotti, *Scritti sul fascismo* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1983), 122.

²⁸ *Il Regime Fascista dopo la marcia su Roma. Raccolta delle deliberazioni del Gran Consiglio con una premessa di Benito Mussolini*, temporary edition [Rome, 1924], 18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ S. Panunzio, *Italo Balbo* (Milan: Imperia, 1923), 34f.; G.B. Guerri, *Italo Balbo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1984); G. Rochat, *Italo Balbo* (Turin: UTET, 1986); C.G. Segrè, *Italo Balbo*

After the MVSN was established, the greatest challenge in the reorganization of fascism's paramilitary force—in addition to the poor discipline of squad members, the difficult selection of officers, and the army's mistrust—was posed by the lack of weapons. For the 189,852 soldiers enlisted in August 1923, there were only 149,026 rifles and 151 machineguns.³² One of the most serious problems stemmed from the fact that the men in power were at once politicians and squad members. In his report from June 15, 1923, commander Vittorio Verné, deputy chief of staff, complained to MVSN general Italo Balbo: "Another fact that significantly slows down the organization [of the armed forces] is political influence in military matters. Assigning political and military responsibilities to the same person is a real hindrance. In an attempt to do too much, one ends up doing a poor job at everything." Furthermore, rivalry among high officials resulted in "a system of patronage within the militia, revolving around the many who used their military ranks as electoral platforms or as means that could be exploited for private and personal advantages."³³ Thus, Verné suggested that:

- a) the militia be shielded, to the extent possible, from political interference, by establishing a distinct separation and incompatibility between political and military offices, and by clearly defining the relationships between militia and party;
- b) cadres be purged ruthlessly, so that the highest posts may be entrusted to those who are worthy of them, and possess the necessary skills;
- c) a firm and iron discipline be kept at all costs.

Acting in this manner, the militia will really be the serious institution that the prime minister says it is, and it will serve not only to defend the revolution and fascist regime against threats within and without, but also to carry out other very important functions. It will prove the best school of the nation for the preservation of the offensive spirit of the race.

(Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988); E. Gentile, "Balbo e il suo tempo," in *Balbo: Aviazione e potere aereo*, ed. C.M. Santoro (Rome: Aeronautica Militare, 1998), 13–48.

³² Segrè, *Italo Balbo*, 157.

³³ Balbo Archive, Rome. I thank the lawyer Paolo Balbo for generously supplying me with the cited documents.

Despite these difficulties in the reorganization of the armed forces, and despite the internal conflicts between soldier and political leaders, paramilitary organization remained the main means by which the fascist party consolidated and extended its control over the country at large. Indeed, in its July session, the Grand Council declared that fascism would keep its “armed forces” until “the state has become entirely fascist,” with the complete replacement of the ruling class, and “until anti-national elements have permanently lost their will to revolt.” The militia was now being defined as “a great political police.”³⁴

In the months that followed, the dualism between militia party and traditional state institutions became rampant, both at the center and on the periphery. At the end of 1923, commander Verné squarely addressed the dilemma in a report on the “state of mind and morale of the militia as regards its functions, its future, and its relationships with the country and with the other armed forces of the state.”

This is the dilemma.

Today, the militia—if it wishes to be solely the *party militia*—is *too militarized*. It has lost its simplicity and effectiveness. It has grown cumbersome and lost sight of its true nature.

If it wishes to be a national militia with a military purpose, *it is still too much a party militia*, and has only a very limited military and combat capability.

This equivocation must be ended, and the path leading into the future must be laid out clearly and decisively.

Verné’s proposed solution prefigured, at the end of 1923, much of what the MVSN was to become after 1926, once the single-party totalitarian regime was installed, with the exception of his final point.

[The militia should have] clear, precise, and unequivocal tasks:

- a) defending the fascist regime;
- b) training the young for the army, with pre-military instruction;
- c) keeping citizens prepared for war, with post-military instruction;
- d) returning to the army or navy in the event of mobilization.

In its first year of existence, Verné continued, the militia only fulfilled the first of these tasks. The points he made on this role, during

³⁴ Balbo Archive.

that first year of fascist government, were realistic appraisals of the obstacles that still hindered the fulfillment of the fascist revolution. At the same time, however, they confirmed that fascism, both party and militia, saw its own rise to power as an irreversible event. It was a *regime*, not merely a *government*, and it had to consolidate its position by politically eliminating all opponents:

While the fascist regime has never seriously been threatened, the presence of this armed force, moved by the highest motives, has inspired a wise prudence in opponents of every stripe.

This first task entrusted to the militia, which was of the greatest import in the period immediately following the revolution, is gradually losing its relevance as the regime consolidates and enlarges its base among the masses of the nation. Although the fascist revolution has not reached its goals as quickly as hoped, for lack of a new ruling class with which to replace the old one, a moment will come—soon, we hope—when internal enemies are forever defeated and there will be no need for a special militia, but only for an ordinary police force.³⁵

The institutionalization of the militia did not prevent the ras from using violence to consolidate their local power and destroy the little that remained of anti-fascist organizations. In a speech held in Turin in April 1923, Cesare Maria De Vecchi, the fascist leader in Piedmont, one of the “quadrumvirs” who organized the March on Rome, and a government member, declared that the fascist revolution was proceeding inexorably:

Whether or not is has consensus, it certainly has the strength that frequently generates consensus, as exemplified by the 300,000 Black-shirts currently enlisted in the voluntary militia for national security. . . . Today they carry muskets and bayonets, but in the future they will have cannons and flame-throwers for the purpose of internal policing and to warn those outside Italy that they must respect us. . . . If necessary, as it surely will be to establish the new order fully and to pursue the supreme end . . . , we will know how to create a state of siege for half an hour and to open fire for a minute. That is all it will take, I think.³⁶

³⁵ Balbo Archive.

³⁶ Cited in *Il Mondo*, April 26, 1923.

In December 1922, De Vecchi himself had sent a message praising the squad members of Turin for murdering twenty-three workers in retaliation for the injuring of two fascists.

Officially, Mussolini condemned fascist unlawfulness, and promised pacification and the restoration of rule of law. On the grounds of these promises, he was voted into office by the parliament and given full powers to balance the state's finances. His government also enjoyed the support of monarchic institutions, the leading figures in the economy, the Church, and conservative public opinion both in Italy and abroad. The constitutional parties placed their trust in the new prime minister. His opponents were helpless, and divided. The proletariat was disbanded and resigned, the bourgeoisie was reassured and satisfied, and the middle class was content. A new electoral law—the “Acerbo Law,” approved in 1923 with support from conservatives and liberals alike—ensured that Mussolini could gain a parliamentary majority enjoyed by no other Italian prime minister before him in the elections of April 6, 1924. The country's economy had been improving since before the March on Rome. Nothing seemed to stand in the way of restoring a parliamentary regime in Italy, as was happening in other European countries after the convulsion of the early postwar years.

Nothing stood in the way of restoration, that is, except the fascist militia party and its leader's decision to view the arrival of fascism at the head of the government as definitive and irreversible. In one of the first meetings of the council of ministers, on December 15, 1922, Mussolini referred to the “absolutely irrevocable nature of the change of regime that took place in October.”³⁷ Four days later, he warned that “the fascist state is strong and committed to defending itself at all costs with cold, inexhaustible energy.”³⁸ On February 10, 1923, he declared to the Chamber of Deputies: “We will last for thirty years at least.”³⁹ On June 8, 1923, he admonished the Senate that “a powerful army of volunteers is ready to defend the nation and this special form of political

³⁷ Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. XIX, 66.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁹ *Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, XXVI Legislatura, 1a Sessione, 2a Tornata, 10 February 1923, 8576.*

regime called fascism.”⁴⁰ On June 23, he promised Roman fascists: “The power is ours, and we shall hold on to it.”⁴¹ On July 7, with regard to the analogies between the Bolshevik and the fascist revolutions, Mussolini clarified: “It is a fact that both revolutions tend to overcome all ideologies, and, in a sense, all the liberal and democratic institutions that followed the French Revolution.”⁴² On July 15, addressing those who denied that there had ever been a fascist revolution, he reiterated before the Chamber of Deputies: “In order to effect a revolution, it is not necessary to stage the choreographies of revolution, or the great drama of the arena. . . . The power is ours, and we shall hold on to it. We will defend it against everyone. Here lies the revolution, in this firm will to maintain power.” For this reason, Mussolini concluded, fascism would continue “until everyone is resigned to the accomplished fact, to its beautiful armor and its beautiful warrior spirit.”⁴³ While always promising the normalization of public order, Mussolini actually tolerated and commanded the use of violence by the fascist militia to crush opposition and extend the power of fascism throughout the country.

Although the militia party ruled by resorting to the violence of its own soldiers and the complicity of the police, persecuting political opponents as if they were enemies of the nation to be eliminated, those who were not under the illusion that the parliamentary regime could survive under these circumstances continued to be very few.⁴⁴ By February 25, 1923, *La critica politica* characterized fascism as a “dictatorial experiment.” On April 25, *La Stampa* observed that by removing members of the People’s Party from government, the fascist party was taking

⁴⁰ Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, XIX, 256.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 315.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 317.

⁴⁴ Among the few liberal politicians and intellectuals to denounce the dictatorial nature of fascism after its ascent to power there were Giulio Alessio and Luigi Albertini; see A Lazzaretto, “Nella crisi dello stato liberale: Giulio Alessio e Alfredo Rocco,” in *Alfredo Rocco: dalla crisi del parlamentarismo alla costruzione dello stato nuovo*, ed. E. Gentile, F. Lanchester and A. Tarquini (Rome: Carocci, 2010), 115–30; L. Zani, “La crisi del liberalismo e del parlamentarismo nel Senato italiano dopo la marcia su Roma,” in *ibid.*, 131–91.

“a step toward achieving total party dictatorship.” According to the newspaper, fascism sought “one-sided dictatorship and a single party system—that is, the suppression of all other parties, and the end of political life as conceived in Europe over the last hundred years.” A few days later, the communist Palmiro Togliatti commented ironically on

the obstinacy with which liberals, democrats and members of the People’s Party continue to hope that fascism may be contained within the bounds of the constitution. To this day, one might say, they continue to hope that the fascist dictatorship will be short-lived, and that fascism will progressively reform itself into a state of lawfulness. The constitution of the national militia has not been enough to shake these hopes. . . . And thus we have come to the expulsion of the members of the People’s Party from the ministry, and thus we will come to the ostracism of all parties that attempt to differentiate themselves from fascism. These are inexorable developments.⁴⁵

The dictatorial politics ascribed to the fascist party was not simply a matter of intent, but also one of deed. Fascism continued to resort to violent and terrorist methods to eliminate opponents and ensure its monopoly of power. It was in this same period that the anti-fascist liberal Giovanni Amendola coined the term “totalitarian” to define the methods adopted by the fascist party to destroy opposition and impose its power on the state. Referring to the concrete action of the fascist party after its ascent to government, on April 11, 1923, Amendola remarked:

Increasingly with each passing day, we are witnessing the implementation of a design that is unsustainable in the long run. A fascist institution is placed alongside each state institution, which it dominates, controls, and paralyzes: the Grand Council is placed side by side with the Council of Ministries, the Political Commissars [of the fascist party] with the prefects, the secretaries of the fasces with the sundry bodies of state authority, and so forth. It goes without saying that in this system a given minister, prefect, chief of police, or other public functionary must obey his counterpart in the fascist hierarchy.

⁴⁵ P. Togliatti, “Sviluppi inesorabili,” *Il Lavoratore*, April 28, 1923.

According to Amendola, the duplicity of powers produced by this overlapping of fascist party and state representatives was mirrored by “the odd and dangerous way of thinking, now dominant in many unofficial and authorized circles, that tends to divide Italian citizens into two classes, with fascists in one and non-fascists in the other. Making its way into practice, this mind set would end up creating, within the same country, two castes: an inferior one, and a privileged one.” People in the latter would allow those in the former a basic existence as silent and obedient subjects, so long as they resigned to “contribute to the expenses of the state, with no say in its government.” Non-fascists were “viewed as civil minors, and for them government was something foreign, beyond control and discussion.”⁴⁶

In the same period, the socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti made similar observations on fascists’ pretensions of belonging to a privileged caste, based on clear documentary evidence on their continued use of violence in order to impose themselves on the state and society, both factually and symbolically. At the end of 1923, the fascist government decreed the “issue of special stamps, where *emblems* of the Italian state and monarchy *were replaced by those of the fascist party*.” New coins were likewise minted. What’s more, Matteotti continued, only fascists “*can carry revolvers and have the license to bear arms*. Possession of the fascist party card is an almost absolute requirement to remain in *public employment* without being harassed. Many state employees, including teachers, magistrates, and workers, have been discharged or fired solely because *they did not meet with the approval of the fascist party*.” Finally, Matteotti concluded, “being fascist has become a second and more important form of Italian citizenship, without which it is impossible to enjoy civil rights or the freedom to vote, to choose where to live, to circulate, to meet with others, to work, to speak, or even to think.”⁴⁷

Even the deputy Alfredo Misuri—a dissident fascist who fell victim to the violence of the squads—addressed the abuse by the fascist party to the detriment of state institutions in a speech before the Chamber

⁴⁶ G. Amendola, *La democrazia italiana contro il fascismo 1922–1924* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960), 84–85.

⁴⁷ Matteotti, *Scritti sul fascismo*, 124–25.

of Deputies, on May 29, 1923: "It is now well known that the usual irresponsible powers of the dominant party, by once again working their way by myriad routes into the bodies of the state and deceiving them, have created absurd situations and set up committees in which a given subordinate functionary, only if endowed with a card required after the March on Rome, is able to retaliate against the rightful strictness of his superior, by legally removing him from his post through early retirement."⁴⁸ To the physical violence against antifascists, the militia party added violence against thought and consciences. It exalted its own ideology in the way a fundamentalist and intolerant religion would, imposed its myths, rituals, and symbols on everyone, and persecuted those who refused to submit to the new creed. At the beginning of November 1923, commenting on the celebrations for the first anniversary of the March on Rome by the government and the fascist party, Amendola wrote that the essential feature of fascism resided in its "totalitarian spirit," which "in the future will not allow any day to dawn not greeted by the fascist salute," and which had unleashed a "unique 'war of religion' to impose its ideology as a faith mandatory for all Italians."⁴⁹

Amendola's juxtaposition of fascism and religion was not casual. A few months before, on April 1, 1923, his newspaper *Il Mondo* observed: "Fascism has not aimed at governing Italy, as much as at monopolizing control over the minds of Italians. It does not content itself with wielding power: it wants to own the private consciences of all citizens, and to effect the "conversion" of Italians . . . fascism has the pretensions of a religion . . . the supreme ambitions and inhumane intransigencies of a religious crusade. It does not promise happiness to those who do not convert, nor does it afford refuge to any who refuse to be baptized."⁵⁰

Antifascist Catholics were particularly alert to fascism's religious pretensions. Before the characterization of fascism as a new religion became established in the self-representation of fascists, it was set forth, alongside the concept of totalitarianism, by anti-fascists. Addressing

⁴⁸ A. Misuri, *Rivolta morale* (Milan: Corbaccio, 1924), 105.

⁴⁹ Amendola, *La democrazia italiana*, 193.

⁵⁰ *Il Mondo*, 1 April 1923.

the tendency on the part of the fascist party to institute a “despotic state,” the Catholic liberal Novello Papafava denounced fascists’ claims to being the sole and intransigent bearers of “an absolute truth,” which they felt legitimized to impose through violence: “Thus, we find ourselves before a new dogmatic religion, with its own sacraments and infallible leader. Anyone who does not love the motherland, according to Benito Mussolini’s will and to the rites he established, is a heretic to be delivered to the purifying fire of the national militia’s muskets.”⁵¹

In February 1924, Luigi Sturzo made a public statement to the effect that Catholicism was incompatible with fascism: “The substance of the theories that fascism has borrowed from nationalism, as well as of those that may be surmised from the political practice of the party-government, is fundamentally pagan and antithetical to Catholicism. It is statolatry and deification of the nation. In addition, fascism admits, encourages, and praises immoral actions like homicide for national ends. The incitement to violence clashes not only with the rule of law, but also, and what’s worse, with the law of love set forth in the Gospel.”

No collaboration on a plane of equality and freedom could exist between Catholics and fascists, Sturzo admonished: “fascism admits no discussions and restrictions. It wants to be *worshipped* in and of itself. It wants to create the *fascist state*.”⁵² Sturzo rejected fascism’s “totalitarian and domineering tendency.” In Italy, he claimed, fascism carried out “the *totalitarian* transformation of each and every moral, cultural, political and religious force into a new conception: ‘the fascist one.’ And because minds cannot be bent and consciences cannot be transformed, fatally, heads and knees are made to bend instead, with the use of external force.”⁵³

A militant Catholic writer faring from the People’s Party, Igino Giordani, was more explicit and spoke of a “fascist religion,” warning the Church against seeking an agreement with fascism. Because of “its totalitarian, egocentric, and absorbing nature,” fascism could not tolerate “isolated and uncontrolled forces outside its jealous grasp.” It only viewed an agreement with the Church as a means to submit

⁵¹ N. Papafava, “Il fascismo e la costituzione,” *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, 28 August 1923.

⁵² Cited in L. Sturzo, *Il Partito popolare italiano* (Rome: Istituto Sturzo, 2003), 14–15.

⁵³ L. Sturzo, *Popolarismo e fascismo* (Turin: Gobetti, 1924), 338.

Catholicism to its political ends according to a Caesaropapist model. Giordani concluded that it would be absurd to think that “fascism might be conformed to the ethical principles of the Church. . . . To be made Christian, [fascism] would have to renounce not only its Caesaropapist ambitions, but also its totalitarian spirit—the violence, amorality, illegality and abuse of power it has perpetrated without restriction. In brief, it would have to renounce all that superfetation of postwar instincts that, whether wrongly or not, is referred to as *fascism* in common parlance.”⁵⁴

Antifascists who spoke of totalitarian fascism in 1923 and 1924, while a parliamentary regime with an uncertain future was still seemingly in place, reflected on the facts at hand. From these, they drew predictions on the consequences that would inevitably follow from the actions of the militia party, unless something intervened to put an end to fascist violence, to the fascist party’s abuse on the state, and to society’s subjection to the despotic and fanatical rule of an armed militia. Amendola, Sturzo, and Matteotti were among the few who understood the novelty of fascism as an experiment of political supremacy, when most politicians were still under the illusion that fascism would end soon, or that it would lose its steam as an independent political force. Fascists assassinated Matteotti on June 10, 1924. Luigi Sturzo, repeatedly threatened by fascists, was finally forced into exile at the end of October 1924. Amendola was repeatedly assaulted by fascists, and died, partly as a result of the last thrashing he received, in a clinic in Cannes on July 20, 1925. Matteotti, Sturzo, and Amendola were among the early victims of fascist totalitarianism. None of them was the victim of unforeseen circumstances. The assassination, the exile, and the thrashing all stemmed from a practice of domination that belonged to the nature of the fascist party from the start. When antifascists came up with the concept of totalitarianism for this practice, they were referring to a method in use, not to a goal to be reached. They were describing a reality, not an aspiration. Matteotti, Sturzo, and Amendola fell victim to a new political experiment, which they had been the first to see for what it was, and had unsuccessfully tried to expose for other Italians to see too.

⁵⁴ I. Giordani, “Motivi di religione fascista,” *Il popolo*, May 10, 1924.

What happened in the period between Matteotti's murder and Mussolini's speech of January 3, 1925, with which fascism definitively set out to destroy the existing parliamentary regime and build a single-party regime, confirmed what Amendola, Matteotti, Sturzo, and a handful of other antifascists had sensed from the start. By the time of Mussolini's speech, the "fact" from which the term "totalitarianism" originated had consolidated its monopoly over power. The day earlier, the antifascist magazine *La Rivoluzione Liberale* (The liberal revolution) published an article by the socialist Lelio Basso, in which the noun "totalitarianism" made its appearance, perhaps for the first time:

As a Marxist, I won't be the one to deny the state its duty as a guardian, as the defender of the interests of the dominant classes. But the fascist state has taken on another task as well: "it does not defend itself, it attacks!" In other words, the fascist state no longer limits itself to safeguarding the established order by means of a legal system adequate to the purpose, within the bounds of which contrary forces are allowed to prepare the ground for a new form of social coexistence. It now claims to represent the entire population, and thus rules out the possibility that there might be a movement opposed to itself, or different from itself, and if any do come forth, albeit timidly, it attempts to crush them beyond repair. When we reach this point—and the institutions traditionally seen as embodying the three powers of the state (the crown, the parliament, and the magistracy, as well as the armed forces that carry out their will) become instruments of a single party that purports to interpret a unanimous will, an indistinct totalitarianism that by its very nature shuts out any further progress—we can confidently claim that the crisis of the state has reached its peak, and that it must be solved or precipitate.⁵⁵

The destruction of the liberal state and the simultaneous establishment of the fascist state originated from the militia party's practice of violence since the fascist government's inception, before it was sanctioned by the authoritarian legislation enacted after 1925. Soon after January 3, 1925, in a book on the crisis of the state that would cost him his teaching position at the university, the antifascist jurist Gustavo Ingrosso observed:

⁵⁵ Prometeo Filodemo [L. Basso], "L'antistato," *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, January 2, 1925.

As soon as the *fascist state* took control of government, it proved to be not the strong state that the unwary supporters of fascism dreamed it would be, but nothing other than a *party-state*. . . . The legitimacy of the government run by the fascist party resides in its representing a *minority* in the country. The constitutional *gap* thus determined is filled by *totalitarian praxis*, a complex system of procedures varying within a broad range of means, from moral violence to physical violence, whereby the minority becomes the *majority*—or rather, it becomes *formal unanimity*.

The genetic link between the militia party, its “totalitarian praxis,” and the birth of the fascist state became a central issue in anti-fascist analysis. In 1925, before being forced into exile, Arturo Labriola wrote that fascism originated from action squads: “[It was] a great phenomenon of spontaneous militarism. . . . Leaders and soldiers felt like members of a voluntary army organized not against *foreigners*, but against *internal enemies*: communists first, then socialists, then democrats, then liberals, and finally . . . even Salandra, that is to say, anyone who didn’t acknowledge fascism as the greatest product of national excellence, and Mussolini as a kind of savior for the country and humanity, the archangel sent to exterminate the anti-nation, which comprised everything other than fascism.” After its rise to power, fascism carried out “a sort of *systematic terrorism*, through which an armed minority ruthlessly keeps its hold on the majority, striking down, in turns, on individuals and on the masses, dissuading everyone from combative opposition,” Labriola continued.⁵⁶

Since the mid-1920s, contemporary observers noted that the power systems that fascism established in Italy and Bolshevism established in Russia were new phenomena in European history. These marked the end of the fleeting triumph of postwar parliamentary democracy, and the beginning of an era inaugurated with the exaltation of dictatorship and the triumph of single-party regimes in Russia and in Italy. The novelty lay in Bolshevism and fascism, as Émile Giraud noted in 1925: “The idea of dictatorship, of government by a minority, has made significant progress. . . . Bolshevism and fascism, while pursuing very

⁵⁶ G. Ingrosso, *La crisi dello stato* (Naples: Ceccoli, 1925), 123; A. Labriola, *Polemica anti-fascista* (Naples: Ceccoli, 1925), 27–29.

different ends, use the same method. Both feel nothing but contempt and scorn for democracy, which they expose as an illusion that populations must be helped to get rid of.”⁵⁷ The following year, while in exile in London, Sturzo wrote: “Fascism is on its way to ‘totalitarianism and absolutism’ . . . experimenting a system that keeps outward forms of popular representation in place, while increasing the government’s powers to such an extent that the it becomes the true arbiter and ruler of every other state power.”⁵⁸

Sturzo was among the first to compare Bolshevism and fascism as new political regimes. Thanks to the translations of his book, he contributed to spreading the new term “totalitarianism” as a way to define their shared features. That same year, the German jurist Hermann Martin pondered the disease suffered by liberalism and parliamentarism that manifested itself in public opinion’s widespread tendency to call for government by “strong men,” whereby many viewed Mussolini as a model. “Fascists have become owners of power: in Italy, their system is called fascist totalitarianism,” Martin wrote.⁵⁹

The word used to describe the new regime created by the fascist militia party thus entered into international language. The early scholars of fascism who used the word in the late 1920s were followed, in the course of the 1930s, by others who conducted increasingly systematic investigations into the single-party regimes established in Russia, in Italy, and later in Germany. These scholars adopted and developed the concept of totalitarianism to define what was shared by the regimes, while never concealing their substantial historical, ideological, social, economic, and planning differences. They did not investigate facts by the light of words. They studied the facts first, and then associated the word coined a decade earlier by Italian anti-fascists with those facts.

⁵⁷ E. Giraud, *La crise de la démocratie et les réformes nécessaires du pouvoir législatif* (Paris: Giard, 1925), 7.

⁵⁸ L. Sturzo, *Italia e fascismo* (Bologna: Zanichelli, [1926] 1965), 204. The book was first published in 1926, in London, not in Italian but in English, and immediately translated into French and German.

⁵⁹ H. Martin, *Demokratie oder Diktatur?* (Berlin: Verlag für Politik und Wirtschaft, 1926), 170.

Part II

History and Society

Stalin the Statesman

A Historian's Notes

VLADIMIR PECHATNOV

Stalin's macabre figure has long been a model for the interpretation of the phenomenon of totalitarianism, and of the role that its founders and leaders played in it. For quite some time, starting with the classic works of Hannah Arendt and the other seminal authors of the theory of totalitarianism, this interpretation matured within the confines of the totalitarian paradigm. Later—as this interpretative model disappeared and the empirical base of scientific research broadened—scholars' attention shifted to the analysis of the socio-political peculiarities of the post-Stalinist Soviet system that was contemporary to them. Consequently, the interest in the figure of its founder declined. The archival revolution that occurred in Russia in the early 1990s spurred a renewed interest in Stalin and Stalinism. The vast majority of the research carried out by the new generation of historians, however, while important, has focused on the specific tendencies of domestic and foreign policies, and on the different aspects of Soviet society in the years of Stalinism.¹ The psychology of Stalin the statesman, his relationship with power, and the style and dilemmas of his statecraft have remained outside the scope of most contemporary scholarship. The key role the great dictator played in the construction and functioning of the Stalinist system, highlighted by Robert C. Tucker's works, was not elaborated further. Also unjustly forgotten were the insights of earlier Sovietologists, like George F. Kennan, Isaiah Berlin, and other contemporaries and eye-witnesses of Stalinism, frequently more perceptive than the theorists

¹ *Istoriia stalinizma*, a series published by Rosspen Publishing House, already comprises over 100 volumes.

of totalitarianism in evaluating Stalin's rule. The archival documents that are now accessible, and the end itself of the Stalinist system, offer glaring proof of this. The present essay, which has no pretension to solve these issues, intends only to add a few brushstrokes to the portrait of Stalin, the leader of a great power, based on the new documentation available.

The "Master of the USSR"

"L'état – c'est moi." This well-known aphorism, attributed to Louis XIV, could just as easily have been uttered by Stalin. Indeed, he was not the umpteenth personification of Russian statalism, but the founder of a new kind of state, a state history had never seen before. Whereas Lenin had founded the Bolshevik Party, guided the October Revolution, and left behind a still very confused and rough outline of the Soviet state, Stalin completed that plan and put it into practice. A great theorist and the man who carried out the construction of socialism—Stalin considered himself thus, and wanted to enter into the conscience of his citizens and of the rest of the world as such. "No one in the world has ever guided such large masses of people," he dictated to the senior staff of the Agitprop² during the session of October 23, 1946, listing the main points on which *Comrade Stalin's Biography* should be built: "The theory of constant factors. The theory of the victory of communism in only one country. The theory of collectivization and industrialization. The theory of state."³

Stalin's identification with the state was strengthened by the Soviet Union being not only a great creature, but also a sort of gigantic extension of himself. Perhaps none of the other great states of the world was molded, to this extent, in the image of one man—a man of exceptional cruelty and distrust toward others, but who was also endowed with

² Shortened form of "Otdel agitatsii i propagandy" (Department for Agitation and Propaganda), the CPSU Central Committee organ dealing with propaganda.

³ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsialno-politicheskoi istorii, Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (henceforth RGASPI), f. 629, op. 1, d. 254, l. 24.

equally rare skills, which allowed him to manage an immense country almost singlehandedly, whether editing newspaper articles and literary works, or exercising incessant control over complex technical and military programs.

Stalin created a pyramidal command structure in which he was the only person to decide on the most important issues, as well as the only person receiving the huge mass of information on the country's internal and external situation. It was not unusual for his subordinates, afraid to take responsibility over matters, to trouble him with trifles, which were therefore habitually "unloaded" from the bottom up, all the way to the top of the hierarchy. In October 1950, for example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed Stalin of a scuffle between a Moscow street cleaner and a tipsy staffer of the U.S. embassy, or of another American diplomat's attempt to smuggle into the country 130 kilograms of potatoes, which it was illegal to import into the USSR. Although this command system resulted in his receiving an overload of information, Stalin paid close attention to everything and everyone. He was well aware that without his "all-seeing eye," without continual jolts and exemplary punishments, the vertical of power he had built would inevitably atrophy. It was necessary to keep the work of hundreds—indeed thousands—of functionaries and Soviet organizations under tight control, and constantly to uncover the "failures" in many different fields.

Let's turn to some other examples.

In September 1948, while he was vacationing in the South, Stalin instructed the Politburo to reprint the letter written by the relatives of Lev Tolstoy, "Against spies of Tolstoy in America," on all newspapers. The anti-Soviet activity of the great writer's daughter, Aleksandra Lvovna Tolstaya, director of the Tolstoy Foundation in America, was a source of great irritation to the Kremlin. Thus, the MGB⁴ had inspired this letter, first published in the *Literaturnaia gazeta*. In his telegram, Stalin, instead of leaving it to journalists, even gave instructions on how

⁴ Ministerstvo gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti SSSR" (USSR Ministry of State Security), active from 1946 to 1953; later, it became Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti (KGB; Committee for State Security).

to present the article: "There needs to be a headline like 'Protest of the members of the family of Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy against the espionage activity of the traitor of the country A. Tolstaya.' The *Literaturnaia gazeta*, he added, 'has not used a headline because the journalists who work there are incompetent and utterly inexperienced.'" ⁵ No wonder, the following day, all major newspapers came out with that title.

It must be acknowledged that Stalin possessed an uncommon endurance at work, was well-informed in many fields, had an extraordinary memory, and a very sharp eye. These traits allowed him to easily detect even slight shortcomings in the actions of his subordinates, who were no match for him in caliber (by then he had gotten rid of all those people who might cast a shadow over his figure). Yet, his "beatings" were often arbitrary and sometimes blatantly sadistic.

Stalin's admonition toward Foreign Trade Minister and Politburo member Anastas Mikoyan can serve as a typical example of his up to the point scolding. At the end of 1946, in the course of complex negotiations on Lend-Lease settlement, Mikoyan had prepared a draft response to the United States, which Stalin deemed messy. "I think Mikoyan's draft statement, which I received on December 15, is contradictory and entirely false," he cabled the Politburo during his customary vacation in the Caucasus. On the one hand, Stalin lamented, it stated that the United States had broken their contractual obligations, and, on the other, these violations were actually encouraged "because they can be passed off as concessions on our part." Finally:

[The document] states that these concessions must not be interpreted as an approval of the violation of our contractual rights. It is a purely Menshevik draft. No self-respecting government could approve such a false decree. Only one of the two is possible: we either accept the request of the Americans, without discussing the violation of our rights, and put 800 thousand dollars to the table; or, if we want to discuss the violation of our rights, we ask that Americans fulfill their contractual obligations, and make no concessions whatsoever.⁶

⁵ Stalin to Loginov, for "the nine," September 20, 1948, Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Archive of the President of the Russian Federation; henceforth APRF), f. 45, op. 1, d. 109, l. 58.

⁶ Stalin to Beria, to Voznesenskii, and to the other members of "the seven," December 16, 1946, collection of documents of the APRF.

The Politburo immediately condemned Mikoyan's "serious mistakes," and ultimately accepted the former of Stalin's suggested solutions.

If, in this case, Mikoyan received a well-earned reprimand, Stalin's rebuke to his deputy Vyacheslav Molotov, in those same days, appears far more sneering.

Following instructions from Stalin himself, Molotov had accepted to be elected an honorary member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. The Academy had strongly pushed this appointment for the second-ranking person in the country. Molotov, who at the time was in New York for the Council of Foreign Ministers conference, prepared a draft of his telegram for the Academy Presidium. In it he gave his assent and offered inevitable words of praise for "the coryphaeus of all sciences." To avoid any risks, he sent it to the coryphaeus himself for his approval. He received this answer: "I was shocked by your telegram. . . . Does election as an honorary member of the Academy really put you in such raptures? What does the valediction 'Your Molotov' mean? I never thought you could be so moved by such a secondary matter. I believe that as a statesman of the highest type you should have held your own worth in greater esteem."⁷

All this occurred after Molotov had effectively concluded important negotiations to ratify peace treaties with Germany's European satellites. His speeches and photographs, therefore, dominated all Soviet newspapers. Precisely for this reason, it would seem, Stalin decided to berate his deputy, who was enjoying a high point of success, once again making clear who was running the show. It was obligatory that Molotov's answer express his gratitude and repentance. "I admit that I committed a thoughtless act," he wrote despondently, "becoming an honorary member does not send me into raptures at all. I would have felt better if this election had not taken place altogether. Thank you for your telegram."⁸

Stalin did not conceive of himself outside the Soviet state, much less did he imagine the state without him. "Harmful to the state," "he does not take account of the state's interests," "he robs the state": these were

⁷ Druzhkov (Stalin's pseudonym in ciphered transcriptions) to Molotov, December 5, 1946, APRF, f. 45, op. 1, d. 770, l. 139.

⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 140.

the expressions he typically used to reprimand his subordinates. The personal enemies of Stalin, who considered himself the great apostle of state interests, immediately became enemies of the state, and, vice versa, the enemies of the Soviet system turned into personal enemies. In this sense, he was a genuine autocrat, who stretched the Russian autocratic tradition to its extreme totalitarian culmination.

The merging of the ruler's personal interests with the interests of the state is the monarchic conception's ancient postulate. In his *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes wrote, "The riches, power, and honour of a Monarch arise only from the riches, strength and reputation of his Subjects."⁹ What mattered to Stalin were not so much the riches as "the strength and reputation" of the Soviet state, its supremacy. In this he saw his life's only true meaning, the assurance of his place in history, and therefore, as Pushkin once said, "the token maybe of immortality."¹⁰

We do not know whether Stalin ever read Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum*, a popular book in the social-democratic circles of prerevolutionary Russia, in which the renowned English thinker presents the statesmen ladder "of honor and reputation," at the top of which he places the founders of great states and empires (*conditores imperiorum*): Romulus, Cyrus, Caesar, Osman, Ishmael.¹¹ Nevertheless, neither material interests alien to him, nor thirst for power as such were central to Stalin. His boundless and unwavering ambition to be the immortal founder of a great state may well have been the guiding light leading him in the dark abyss of his psyche.

The people of the USSR were only a means to this great end, a renewable resource that could be used far more liberally than the natural assets and riches of the land. Stalin often used the expression "spending soldiers," and once, in a conversation with Zhou Enlai during the Korean War, he was even more explicit. He believed the war was mostly weakening the United States, for Koreans, he said, "have not lost

⁹ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, Interpretations*, ed. R.E. Flathman and D. Johnston (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 104.

¹⁰ A. Pushkin, "Feast in Time of Plague," quoted in G.S. Smith, *D. S. Mirsky: A Russian-English Life, 1890-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 75.

¹¹ F. Bacon, *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. M. Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 164.

anything, apart from their war casualties.”¹² Never mind that there had been almost one million of them.

For Stalin this instrumental use of the population, characteristic of dictators throughout history, joined forces with the intimate conviction that, as Lenin had said, “the Russian is a bad worker” and that therefore he must be guided with the proverbial stick and iron discipline. This view was tacitly shared by the Soviet party and government nomenclatura, as well as by the expert Western observers of the time, who were convinced that “you couldn’t do otherwise” with this people, particularly if the aim was to reach great results. “Indolence, abulia, and ineffectuality are profoundly rooted in the Russian people,—wrote the British Charge d’affaires Frank Roberts in a report from Moscow in 1946,—Therefore, if the country is to maintain its place on the international stage, it must constantly be kept under pressure. Because of these national traits, the Soviet people must be led with a very firm hand.”¹³

For Stalin the great end justified the means, all the more considering that, measured against the scale of state might, under his leadership Russia had indeed become a great power. “He took over a Russia still using the wooden plow, and left it equipped with atomic weapons”: Churchill probably never said these words attributed to him by Isaac Deutscher, but at the time this was certainly the prevailing opinion in the West. The British Embassy itself, in its evaluation of the Stalinist administration contained in a special report to Churchill, noted that: “At Lenin’s death, . . . the Union had not been formed yet, and Russia was a shattered, underdeveloped, and rural country. Stalin has turned it into a first-rate industrial power, the center of a new empire.”¹⁴

¹² APRE, f. 45, op. I, d. 329, l. 167.

¹³ Mr. Roberts to Mr. Bevin, March 14, 1946, in P. Preston and M. Partridge, eds., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, part IV, series A (*The Soviet Union and Finland*, 1946), vol. 1 (Bethesda, MC: University Publications of America, 1999), 100. For more details on this stereotype about the “naturalness of Stalinism” for Russia, widespread in the British establishment, see M. Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall, and the Soviet Union, 1941–1945* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 46–47.

¹⁴ *Soviet Union: Quarterly Report*, January–March 1953 (Sir A. Gascoigne to Mr. Churchill, 8 April 1953), The National Archives of Great Britain (henceforth TNA), Prime Minister Papers (henceforth PREM), 11/540.

Stalin's perception of himself as the founder of a new great state strengthened, apparently, with the end of the Great Patriotic War. Before the eyes of millions of people, including those of the *vozhd*,¹⁵ the war became the best possible rehabilitation of the Stalinist system, giving new meaning to millions of victims of the collectivization and industrialization period, and proving—as Andrei Zhdanov put it in one of his speeches—“just how right Comrade Stalin was.”¹⁶ The Soviet Union had emerged from the war as one of the world's major military powers with extended borders and increased imperial sphere of influence while Stalin himself had become a recognized world leader. Perhaps the twentieth century never witnessed a faster and more dizzying transformation than the one affecting the USSR. The latter went from being an international “pariah” with no rights to being a member of the “Big Three,” the prestigious club of the major winning powers. Exhausted by the war, the USSR appeared stronger than it really was, however. This was all the more reason for Stalin to do everything he could to keep up the impression, both inside and outside the country, that the USSR strength was unshakable, and that its new status on the world stage was irreversible.

This inevitably led to Stalin's firm reaction to any attempt on the part of the Allies to belittle the USSR's role in the war and in the new post-war world, or to gain unilateral advantages at the expense of the Soviets. In August 1945, when the U.S. president Harry Truman unexpectedly requested permission to have a United States Air Force base “on one of the Kuril Islands,” Stalin answered with dry sarcasm: “Requests of this kind are usually made either to a defeated state or to an allied state that is not in a position to defend a certain part of its territory on its own and is therefore willing to grant its ally permission to build a military base. I do not think the Soviet Union can be counted in either group of states.”¹⁷

¹⁵ *Vozhd* is Stalin's epithet par excellence; literally, it means “leader” or “guide,” and is a perfect equivalent of the Italian *duce* and the German *führer*.

¹⁶ RGASPI, f. 77, op. 1, d. 975, l. 50.

¹⁷ *Perepiska predsedatelia Soveta Ministrov SSSR s prezidentami SSHA i premer-ministrami Velikobritanii vo vremia Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny 1941–1945, v 2-kh tomakh* (Moscow, Gospolitizdat), vol. 1, 265.

At the end of October of that same year, once the U.S. government's lack of interest in consulting with the USSR over Japan became apparent to Stalin, he addressed the U.S. ambassador Averell Harriman in an equally sarcastic tone: "Could it be that America needs satellites, rather than allies? I must say the Soviet Union is unsuited for this role."¹⁸

With the same obstinacy, the *vozhd* inculcated the superpower mentality in his collaborators, fighting the persistent Russian-Soviet inferiority complex toward the West. Apparently, this was one of the hidden reasons for the campaign against "flattery" and "servility" toward the West that Stalin launched among the higher echelons of Party and state in the fall of 1945.¹⁹ Echoes of the campaign were heard in the nomenklatura long before it was publicly announced. For instance, during a Central Committee session in July 1946, the CC secretary Aleksey Kuznetsov reminded functionaries in charge of foreign propaganda of Stalin's instructions. "Building on the results of the war that turned us into a very strong power, we must develop our own active and independent foreign policy, anywhere and everywhere. Ambassadors too have received the directive not to grovel, but to behave more bravely."²⁰ The instruction "not to grovel" had been issued repeatedly.

In Stalin's intentions, his appeal to national dignity and self-esteem (what he called "the national pride of the great Russians") should also have strengthened the Soviets' imperviousness to "Western influence," cultivating not only an ideological sense of class, but also a sense of their national-cultural superiority over the West, perceived as "decadent" and "devoid of morals." Dealing with the intelligentsia, which maintained its tradition of deference to the West even during the Soviet period, was a particularly complex operation. During the Central Committee's notorious session on the *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*

¹⁸ Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation), f. 7, op. 10-v, p. 46, d. 1, l. 23.

¹⁹ For more details, see V.O. Pechatnov, "*Soiuzniki nazhimaiut na tebia dlia togo, chtoby slomit u tebia voliu . . .*" *Perepiska Stalina s Molotovym i drugimi chlenami Politbiuro po vneshnepoliticheskim voprosam v sentiabre-dekabre 1945-1946*, in *Vestnik*, no. 2, 1999, 81-82.

²⁰ RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 385, l. 76.

journals (August 1946),²¹ Stalin addressed the intelligentsia with these words: “You are walking on your tiptoes as if you were pupils and they the mentors. It is wrong in its very essence.”²²

But how could a sense of national dignity and self-esteem be instilled in people whose personal dignity was continuously trampled on by an omnipotent state? How could mere cogs in the state machine be taught to be the masters of their own lives, when even the nomenklatura that managed them dreaded responsibility and did nothing but “blow smoke in the eyes”? In a system in which “one man rules and everyone else is afraid”—as the head of the Foreign Office Anthony Eden, who regularly frequented Stalin’s Kremlin, put it—only the *vozhd* could truly feel himself to be a real master, responsible for the whole country. Not by coincidence did his comrades-servers refer to him behind his back as “the Master.”

No wonder, the “Master of the USSR” singlehandedly had to fight the chaos and confusion of Russian life, which were ineradicable, evidently, even in the state of total control he had imposed on it. To become aware of this, it was enough to move a short distance away from Moscow. It is well known that Stalin traveled very seldom in the country, and every one of his itineraries was scrupulously prepared far in advance. Yet when he did, there were things impossible to hide from him. This, for example, is what he saw from his coach window in 1948 as he traveled south for his usual holiday: “Everywhere along the railroad, from the Ukraine to Simferopol, huge quantities of collected grain are heaped up in the stations, under the open sky. If it rains, the grain will be lost,” he cabled from the train to “the nine” of the Politburo,²³ instructing them to punish the main culprit, the Minister of

²¹ [The Central Committee’s “Resolution on the Journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*,” dated 14 August 1946, is considered the starting point of the campaign for ideological orthodoxy in the field of culture, promoted mainly by Stalin and known as *zhdanovshchina*, from Zhdanov, who put it into effect. The resolution was mainly directed against the works of two renowned figures of the Russian literary world, Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko, but with it the party intended to stamp out lines of thought and of cultural expression that were deep-rooted in Russian society.]

²² APRF, f. 45, op. 1, d. 1127, l. 6.

²³ Stalin customarily addressed each one of his missives only to certain members of the Politburo, selected to discuss specific matters. Each letter’s header reflected this selection. In this case, Stalin addressed the key nine members of the Politburo.

Supply Boris Dvinskii. "It is time we put an end to these crimes. You also need to give the Minister of Railroads a good drubbing. I expect you to take concrete measures."²⁴ Those responsible for this misdeed were immediately punished, and the grain was removed from the stations.

The next month, he issued another lively dispatch from the South:

I was passing through Sebastopol. The city, with all its ruins, gives an oppressive feeling. If the reconstruction work continues at the present pace, it will take 10–15 years, or longer, for it to be completed. If Moscow does not take action, the city will continue to be filled with rubble for a long time, providing a vivid demonstration of our organizational ineptitude, which will be interpreted as impotence. I cannot understand why we are intervening in the reconstruction of Ashgabat, and yet do not want to take on the reconstruction of a great maritime fortress. Does an earthquake have to strike before we finally rebuild Sebastopol the way it deserves?²⁵

That same day, the Politburo informed Stalin that it had just instituted a special committee to solve the problem. Only then did the reconstruction of the city start in earnest. It is emblematic that Stalin worried not only about the deplorable state in which the "great maritime fortress" languished, but also about the impact this circumstance would have on the population's perception of power ("[it] will be interpreted as our impotence").

Stalin's reaction to the earthquake in Ashgabat, which also took place when he was vacationing in the Caucasus, repeated the same refrain even louder: "In relation to the events in Ashgabat, the Soviet Union looks too primitive," he wrote in his umpteenth letter to "the nine," observing the lack of a qualified assessment, and the local authorities' inability to remedy the disaster. "What is Turkmenistan—scorched earth? Some might think we are not an advanced state, equipped with its own observatories and seismic stations, but rather a place like Ethiopia."²⁶ Once again, clearly Stalin was not bothered as much by the thousands of people killed in the earthquake as by the

²⁴ Stalin to Molotov, November 9, 1948, APRF, f. 45, op. 1, d. 109, l. 4.

²⁵ Stalin to Molotov, October 11, 1948, APRF, f. 45, op. 1, d. 109, l. 106.

²⁶ Stalin to Molotov to "the nine," October 8, 1948, APRF, f. 45, op. 1, d. 109, l. 102.

damage this might procure to the prestige of the “advanced state” he led, this time before the eyes of the whole world.

Stalin’s obsession with the superpower image of the Soviet Union, which was inextricably linked with his personal honor and dignity, sometimes took bizarre forms. It is known, for instance, that he very much disliked the informal nickname of “Uncle Joe” he was given in the West during the war: once, in the middle of Teheran conference, he nearly abandoned the session in sign of protest against this humiliating familiarity. A less-known example is his reaction to the demonstration of annoyance on the part of Molotov, who, during the Paris peace conference in the summer of 1946, left the French military parade rather theatrically for having been placed with the guests of honor, but in the second row. “I do not know if I acted rightly,” Molotov telegraphed Stalin from Paris, either to safeguard himself, or, more likely, to elicit a compliment. If the latter was the case, Molotov got the result he was after. “You acted very well,” Stalin answered, “the dignity of the Soviet Union must be defended not only in large matters, but also in small ones.”²⁷ Surely in Stalin’s mind “defending the dignity of the Soviet Union” was no small matter.

Stalin measured the strength of the state not only by its economic and military power, but also by the bearings of its leaders and the shrewdness of its diplomacy. For him, the world was the battlefield of a ruthless war of “everyone against everyone,” in which the weak had to be defeated and the strong feared, and where there was no room for generosity, not even toward one’s allies. In the summer of 1947, to compel the Czechoslovakian government not to participate in the Marshall Plan, Stalin had to resort to more than just threats. He had to promise that the USSR would increase its economic and commercial aid to the country. While examining the agreement with Czechoslovakia that the Ministry of Foreign Trade had drawn up on his command, Stalin detected an asymmetry in the mutual obligations between the two interested parties. Whereas Soviet supplies were described in detail, Czechoslovakian ones were presented only in vague terms. What’s more, Czechoslovakia showed no eagerness to advance in the

²⁷ Druzhkov to Molotov, August 26, 1946, collection of documents of the APRF.

Sovietization of its regime, and this increased Moscow's discontent. A harsh warning to the Politburo ensued: "In a system of collaboration between the USSR and Czechoslovakia, we cannot allow that the USSR play the part of the simpleton who doesn't know how to defend his best interests, and Czechoslovakia the part of the astute partner who fools the USSR around. Furthermore, it must be remembered that the USSR is a Soviet country—the country of socialism—and its interests cannot be subordinated to those of a non-Soviet state, even if it is an ally."²⁸

The year before, Stalin had decided to reduce the number of Soviet troops in Mongolia. He wrote to Molotov lamenting that these represented a "heavy burden" for the USSR, as well as a useless loss of money, which stayed in Mongolia. The Mongolian government opposed this reduction, he added, but "the request of the Mongolians, as far as we're concerned, is not a reason."²⁹ Stalin believed the *raisons d'état*, the interests of the Soviet state (according to his personal understanding of them, of course), were above everything else—above the interests of the allies, of foreign communist parties (which he often sacrificed for the sake of his politics), and even of world revolution. After all, Stalin saw no contradiction between Soviet egoism and proletarian internationalism, for the Soviet Union was the main bulwark against imperialism. "The actions of the Red Army too serve the cause of the world revolution," he told Georgi Dimitrov.³⁰

In a Besieged Fortress

It is often said that Stalin intentionally exaggerated external threats in order to keep the internal situation under control, and that he was the first not to believe his accounts. This is probably not true. Stalin's attitude toward the outside world may be seen as a combination of three essential elements of his conscience and psyche. First, the

²⁸ Stalin to "the seven," October 2, 1947, APRF, f. 45, op. 1, d. 106, l. 149.

²⁹ Stalin to Molotov, November 2, 1946, APRF, f. 45, op. 1, d. 102, l. 108.

³⁰ G. Dimitrov, *Devnik (9 mart 1933–6 fevruari 1949)* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski," 1997), 188.

foreign policy tradition inherited from tsarist Russia, characterized by alienation from the West, enhanced sense of its own vulnerability, and an aspiration to security by territorial expansionism and self-reliance (Alexander III famously said that Russia had only two allies: its army and its navy). Second, the ideology and the practice of Bolshevism, which exacerbated these traits, and particularly the country's sense of isolation and its self-perception as being surrounded by enemies and finding itself "forever on the brink of military invasion" (Lenin). Third, the specific traits of Stalin's own psyche: boundless distrust, vindictiveness, xenophobia, mania of persecution. These elements combined to create an enemy encirclement complex "raised to the third power." Keeping guard at all times, identifying and destroying hidden enemies, distrusting everyone, and assuming the worst in others' intentions and actions—these were the fundamental precepts of Stalinist political morals.

Indeed, Stalin saw spies everywhere. In 1933, noticing an impartial appraisal of the collectivization by some foreign correspondents in a *tassovka*,³¹ he sent Molotov and Kaganovich the following telegram: "By any chance, do you know who let Moscow's foreign correspondents go on the Kuban? They wrote a bunch of filth on the situation of the Kuban . . . We must put an end to this, and prevent these misters from wandering through the Soviet Union. The USSR has more than enough spies as it is."³²

In the fall of 1948, a fire broke out on the "Pobeda" ship in the port of Batumi. The boat, which carried Armenian repatriates, had just arrived from the United States. The MGB's official account stated that the Americans had poured a "flammable substance" over the ship in New York, but this seemed too naive to Stalin ("So why didn't it go up in flames sooner?"), who ordered that the American saboteurs be found among the repatriates. "Their primary objective is to set our oil stations on fire," he wrote.³³

³¹ In Soviet jargon, *tassovki* were the news and information released by the country's only official press agency, the TASS, "Telegrafnoe Aгенstvo Sovetskogo Soiuza" (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union).

³² Stalin to Molotov and Kaganovich, 19 February 1933, in *Stalin i Kaganovich. Perepiska. 1931–1936 gg.* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2001), 301.

³³ APRE, f. 45, op. 1, d. 109, l. 55.

In a besieged fortress, it is better to err on the side of vigilance and distrust than to allow oneself the luxury of rest and recreation. Thus, Stalin's personal inclinations were perceived as a grave necessity even by those who dissented from his views and became, in turn, the targets of his suspicion. This is what Nikolai Bukharin, presaging the personal and global catastrophe under way, wrote to Stalin in November 1937: "I know you are distrustful, and often you are very wise in your distrust . . . You never grow old. You possess an iron tenacity. You are an innate war leader, and you will still have to play the part of the triumphant Commander-in-Chief of our armies."³⁴

We do not know what Stalin felt reading these words, which in many ways proved prophetic, written by an old comrade in arms he had already sentenced to death. It is unlikely that he believed the sincerity of the "Party's darling," but the ideas expressed by Bukharin must have pleased him. "Wise in your distrust": it could not have been put better.

Conversely, in Stalin's hierarchy of values, qualities like sincerity, trust, simplicity, and even honesty were a statesman's worst vices. Stalin continuously faulted his collaborators, diplomats, and even the agents of the secret services for their "ingenuousness," "lack of shrewdness," and inability to understand the bad intentions of the enemy. His most expressive allocution in this regard is perhaps the one given during the Central Committee session of March 30, 1949, which Petr Pospelov, then chief editor of the *Pravda*, noted down in his diary. This is an extract from Stalin's conclusive speech, as recorded by Pospelov: "Where is the main danger now? It comes from honest people who are stupid and blind. At the hands of these honest but blind people our country can perish. . . . Wasn't the bear in Krylov's fable honest?"³⁵ Our enemies conduct their policy by the hands of these fools."³⁶ Enemies, therefore, were omnipresent, strong, and astute. Soviet people, on the other hand, were bland, lazy, weak, and gullible. And even among the people in charge of country, there were those who were "honest and stupid." What could be done with such people?

³⁴ Bukharin to Stalin, November 20, 1937, APRF, f. 45, op. 1, d. 710, l. 181.

³⁵ Stalin is clearly referring to Krylov's fable *The Hermit and the Bear*, in which a bear, to chase away a fly from his human friend's face, accidentally smashes his skull.

³⁶ Final words by Comrade Stalin, March 30, 1949, RGASPI, f. 629, op. 1, d. 95, l. 244–6.

Stalin would have answered that they could be kept frightened, toughened, and indoctrinated. As far as frightening was concerned, the strategy was clear. The Stalinist control-and-terror machine worked overtime to ensure that no one ever feel safe. Indeed, even the most trusted people were not beyond suspicion. This included the *nomenklatura*, which had to be purged periodically. It was an easy enough problem to solve. For example, in the summer of 1933, in a letter to Molotov, Stalin wrote unfavorably of the People's Commissariat of Finance: "In my opinion, the whole apparatus needs to be checked and cleaned up, in the spirit of Bolshevism."³⁷ It was no sooner said than done!

As for toughening the population, the best course was to inflict great burdens and trials on it: work, privations, heroic enterprises, and even the fire of war. Once, in a rush of sincerity, Stalin confided in an American guest he liked, the leader of the Republican Party, Wendell Willkie, who was visiting the USSR in the fall of 1942: "Our countries—that is, the Soviet Union, England, and the United States—have to be bombed, for our people are guilty of blissful optimism and conceit. This happens because in our countries they have preached humanitarian values, whereas in Germany they have preached murder."³⁸ After all, Stalin believed the war had been useful, because it had toughened and mobilized Soviet people. This is what he said during a meeting with delegates of the Finland-USSR Association in October 1945: "The war raised great intellectual forces in the population, and helped it to find new methods and techniques for work and production. . . . People learned to work better and faster. In brief, as the proverb says, "there is no evil without good." If we look closely at the most terrible event, we will find some good in it. War, without doubt, created a clear benefit for the development of production, and for the ability to work."³⁹

Yet frightening and toughening the population was not enough. People also needed to have faith—in the Soviet regime, in the

³⁷ Stalin to Molotov and Kaganovich, APRF, f. 45, op. 1, d. 769, l. 117.

³⁸ APRF, f. 45, op. 1, d. 380, ll. 30–31.

³⁹ Conversation between Stalin and the delegation of the Finland-USSR Association, October 8, 1945, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 371, l. 161.

infallibility of the Party and its ideology, and in Stalin himself. Stalin understood that while the cult of personality was useful, it was not a solid foundation for this faith, which had to be rooted in personal conviction, awareness, and the assimilation of Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist theories. “You are breeding idolaters instead of awakening people’s conscience,” he lashed out at the Agitprop bosses during a meeting in October 1946.⁴⁰

As for ideological education, there was the great machine of political instruction, and there were the works of classic authors, including those by Stalin himself, whose publication and dissemination the *vozhd* followed with the utmost care. When the *Pravda* delayed the review of the fifth volume of Stalin’s complete works after its publication, this prompted him to come forth with a stern reprimand:

It is truly very odd that *Kultura i Zhizn* and *Bolshevik* have long come out with news of the publication of the fifth tome and even with a review, whereas the *Pravda*, the Central Committee’s main organ, has not been able to release any news of its publication. The *Pravda* may very well not issue a review, on account of the many important matters it must deal with, but it should have announced the publication before *Kultura i Zhizn* and *Bolshevik* did. It is elementary: its own prestige suffers from this delay.⁴¹

“Dear Comrade Stalin, allow me to assure you that I am deeply moved by your just reprimand, and that I will draw the necessary conclusions from your instructions” Pospelov replied, trying to make amends. (A few years later, Pospelov would chair the commission of the Central Committee appointed to prepare the report on the “cult of personality,” which was very critical of Stalin.) “I feel extreme shame for the mistake that has been made, which is due, first, to an inability to focus attention on the most important matters, and, second, to a kind of deficiency—a lack of initiative.”⁴² Indeed, bringing about a real awakening of consciousness was a considerable feat even among the

⁴⁰ Conversation with Comrade Stalin, October 23, 1946, RGASPI, f. 629, op. I, d. 54, l. 24.

⁴¹ Pospelov to Poskrebyshv, August 21, 1947, RGASPI, f. 629, op. I, d. 54, l. 32.

⁴² Pospelov to Comrade Stalin, August 24, 1947, RGASPI, f. 629, op. I, d. 54, l. 33.

Party and state nomenklatura. The Central Committee continuously received reports on the depressing findings of the periodic assessments of ideological education at all levels. For example, the 1946 report on the Kirov Region showed that half of the Party functionaries could not name a single work by Lenin or Stalin, and that most of ordinary Party members were still in no condition to absorb the *Short Course*.⁴³ But if even the straightforward *Short Course* was too exacting for simple communists, where should ideological indoctrination start? Stalin found an answer to this question, too. Pospelov jotted down these wise words spoken by the *vozhd* during the same meeting with the leadership of the Agitprop mentioned above: "The great masses of workers, the simple people, cannot approach the study of Marxism-Leninism by taking on the works of Lenin and Stalin. They must start with biographies. Biographies are a very important thing, and they have a huge meaning for the Marxist education of the simple people."⁴⁴

Evidently for Stalin, a former seminarian, the biographies of the classic authors of Marxism-Leninism were similar to the lives of the saints, and in the subsequent stage of development of the population's ideological-religious conscience, in which the infallible Party would take the place of the Almighty, the *Short Course* would serve as the Holy Scripture. "It is necessary to inculcate the love for the Party, which is immortal": this was the great mission entrusted to the members of the Agitprop gathered at the Kremlin. It is hard to say whether a frightening fanaticism or an exasperated cynicism prevailed in this directive. And yet Stalin had no doubt: for simple people, ideology and religious faith were one and the same. In that speech, Stalin coined an expression that was very telling: "Marxism is the religion of class, its creed."⁴⁵

⁴³ *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course*. This compendium of Soviet history was published in 1938 under Stalin's direct supervision, and summarizes Stalin's ideological theorization, which he used to legitimize himself as sole depositary and custodian of the legacy left behind by Lenin and the Revolution following the tradition of Marxism-Leninism.

⁴⁴ Conversation with Comrade Stalin, October 23, 1946, RGASPI, f. 629, op. 1, d. 54, l. 23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 25, 29.

This idea, which the great vulgarizer of Marxism had apparently been brooding over for some time, evokes surprising analogies with the views of one of the most creative Marxist thinkers of the twentieth century, Antonio Gramsci, who in his famous *Prison Notebooks* wrote: "In the masses as such, philosophy can only be experienced as a faith. . . . The most important element [in this process] is undoubtedly one whose character is determined not by reason, but by faith."⁴⁶ But what Gramsci set forth as a sad theoretical observation, Stalin used as a guiding principle to implant Bolshevism as something between awareness and idolatry.

Permanent Mobilization

"Why don't I love people like Zoshchenko?" Stalin asked during the Central Committee session on the *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* journals. "Because they preach disengagement, and say: 'Away with you and with your ideas! Your ideas give no repose and we want to relax, laugh, and play.'"⁴⁷ One might ask where the harm in that is. Artem Sergeev—a friend of the dictator's second born son, Vasily Stalin—reports that in the intimacy of family life Stalin too enjoyed reading Zoshchenko aloud, and that sometimes, as he read, "he laughed to tears."⁴⁸ Yet the most dangerous enemies of a system built on the new secular religion and on permanent mobilization were neither the external ones (imperialists) nor the internal ones (parasites), but precisely disengagement and lassitude. Bolshevism, which continuously exercised violence on history and its own people, was incompatible with ordinary petty-bourgeois life. Molotov, a faithful Stalinist, put it well right before dying: "If you lead a tranquil life, Bolsheviks are not necessary, not necessary at all. They never stop—they move on to overcome difficulties. But for

⁴⁶ *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 339.

⁴⁷ APRE, f. 45, op. I, d. 1127, l. 16.

⁴⁸ F. Chuev, *Molotov: poludnerzhavnyi vlastelin* (Moscow: OLMA-Press, 1999), 360.

a tranquil life what's the use of Bolsheviks? Social democrats are much more suited. That's precisely what they are for. Social democrats, in a sense, submit to this spontaneous flow of capitalism."⁴⁹

The naturalness, spontaneity, and normal flow of life were profoundly foreign to the spirit of Bolshevism, to its obsession with organizing everything and everyone, and with subjugating people's actions and thoughts to a single plan. But the hypertension and permanent mobilization of this system had to be calibrated very carefully. Stalin's evil political genius—which Isaiah Berlin, a careful observer of Stalinist Russia, understood better than others—consisted in his being the first to find a solution to the eternal dilemma that presented itself after each great revolution, which either was mired in the swamp of everyday life, or lost control in a suicidal orgy of fanaticism and terror. Berlin called Stalin's invention, his answer to this dilemma, "artificial dialectic," and identified it with the ability to alternate periods marked by turmoil and purges with others characterized by temporary calm and the easing of tension. The Party's "general line" oscillated between these extremes in the war against competing "deviations." The "successful operation" of this technique, however, was contingent on certain abilities, Berlin wrote. "[It] depends on a capacity for organizing all available natural and human resources, for completely controlling public opinion, for imposing an ultra-rigid discipline on the entire population; and, above all, on a sense of timing which demands great skill and even genius on the part of individual manipulators—especially of the supreme dictator himself."⁵⁰

It is well known that authorities had already tightened their hold on Zoshchenko, Vertinsky, and other "layabouts" during the war years war. Back then, however, these people were not considered as dangerous as they were now. The population was under pressure of the war, and political leaders were likewise engaged in more serious matters. On the ideological plane, the war years had brought on a loosening of the political grip. But the war ended, and the population, after enduring exorbitant tension and sacrifice, started to long for normalcy—for

⁴⁹ Ibid., 378.

⁵⁰ I. Berlin (under the pseudonym O. Utis), "Generalissimo Stalin and the Art of Government," *Foreign Affairs* 30 (1952): 210–11.

a calm, private life. At the Kremlin, however, final drafts of the five-year plan for reconstruction were already in the making, and the driving forces of the ensuing competition with the West were being unleashed. This, once again, called for a great mobilization of human resources. Against this backdrop, “people like Zoshchenko” became intolerable. On February 9, 1946, in his famous speech at the Bolshoi Theater, Stalin announced to the country the great new goals at which it should aim, and he attacked imperialism and the inevitable conflicts it had engendered. The following month, he further stressed the subject of military threat in his answer to Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech. In April, at the Central Committee’s session on party ideology, Andrei Zhdanov denounced on Stalin’s behalf just how faulty the logic by which “after the war you must let people rest, etc.” was. “If we abide by this kind of politics,” Zhdanov added, “we will find ourselves in a very critical situation.”⁵¹ It’s a short step from this to the public campaign that would take the name *zhdanovshchina*.

By then, Zhdanov had become so adept at putting Stalin’s thoughts into words that the latter need only make minor corrections to his speeches, and occasionally pay him a compliment. “I have read your report,” Stalin wrote to Zhdanov reviewing his draft of the key speech on the matter of the *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* journals (a draft Zhdanov had submitted to Stalin with a simple note, “Will this do?”). “I think your report is excellent. We must have it printed as soon as possible, and then have it published in a separate booklet. You will find my remarks in the text. Goodbye, Stalin.” The observations Stalin made were targeted and toughened the tone of Zhdanov’s text, which was violent to begin with. To Zhdanov’s assessment of the *Leningrad*, Stalin added the following sentence: “it has become a journal that helps enemies to corrupt our youth.” He inserted the epithet “bourgeois” in the expression “veneration for foreign literature,” and followed the exhortation “we must not educate people in the spirit of disinterest and disengagement” with an effective conclusion: “but in the spirit of fortitude and Revolution.”⁵²

⁵¹ RGASPI, f. 77, op. 1, d. 976, l. 35, 43.

⁵² Stalin to Zhdanov, November 19, 1946, APRF, f. 45, op. 1, d. 732, ll. 18–19, 24.

Conclusions

Fortitude and revolutionary spirit, fear and faith, the notion of enemy encirclement, one man rule, total mobilization, and the utmost extortion of the Soviet people: these pillars of Stalin's regime held as long as he was alive. "I am dying, but the state remains," Louis XIV said confidently as he lay on his deathbed. Stalin could only hope for as much, for at the end of his life he was agitated by dark premonitions of what would remain of his creature after his demise. "Imperialists will drown you like kittens," he told Nikita Khrushchev and other comrades in arms.

"Imperialists" themselves reflected on the same point, especially right after the great dictator died. In his report on Stalin's funeral addressed to Churchill, the British ambassador in Moscow, Sir Gascoigne, wrote:

The crucial question is this: will the imposing legacy that Stalin left his successor be solid enough to survive his death? Will the machine and myth of power created by Stalin withstand the pressure of the centrifugal forces that will inevitably manifest themselves not only in the Soviet Union, but also in satellite countries, and particularly in China? We may be witnessing the end of the Augustan era of the Soviet Empire. Stalin, however, consolidated all its parts so tightly around the center that if the spirit of independence or rivalry should surface, then the process of disintegration, if there should be one, would develop only by degrees.⁵³

Isaiah Berlin believed the main threat to the post-Stalinist regime lay elsewhere. Because the Soviet system was not self-correcting, in many ways its destiny depended on whether Stalin's successors would learn to use the command mechanism he had devised according to the laws of "artificial dialectic." This was "too complicated to be used by anyone other than a great master of manipulation, and too dangerous to be set aside, neglected or abandoned." The invention of this tool, "capable

⁵³ *Soviet Union: Quarterly Report*, January–March 1953 (Sir A. Gascoigne to Mr. Churchill), April 8, 1953, TNA, PREM 11/540.

of breaking people's will and, at the same time, of compelling them to work to the limit of their abilities," Berlin added, could only spring out of "an even greater contempt for the freedom and the human ideals than that with which Dostoyevsky endowed his Grand Inquisitor."⁵⁴

George Kennan reflected on the same subject, and, with great insight, singled out the tendency to self-extinction typical of all totalitarian systems as the fundamental weakness of Stalinism. Even professional experts on totalitarianism, enthralled by its vital force, had failed to pick up on this tendency—totalitarian regimes' inability to maintain their initial dynamism once their founders stepped aside.

These kinds of men can leave behind only a fragment of their passion for the battle to those in their entourage who inherit their power, and the process of succession cannot go further. [The people who come to be in charge] may carry on by force of habit, influenced by a second-hand emotional inertia, but they are no longer able to pass it on to others. . . . The cruelty, the lying, the endless derision of human nature practiced in concentration camps: these institutions of the police state may, at first, have something of the evil force of attraction that expressions of danger and anarchy always exercise in a tranquil and ordered society, but in the long run they are destined, like a certain monotonous and repetitive pornography, to bore everyone, including those who practice them.⁵⁵

Hence, the more perceptive Western contemporaries were not much off the mark in their predictions. The totalitarian regime built by the great dictator did not outlive him for long: there was too much of Stalin in it.

⁵⁴ Berlin, "Generalissimo Stalin and the Art of Government," 212 and 214.

⁵⁵ G.F. Kennan, "America and Russian Future," *Foreign Affairs* 29 (1951): 336–67.

Stalin's Dictatorship

Priorities, Policies, and Results

OLEG KHLEVNIUK

The Stalinist period is the last phase of Soviet history that may be studied with the contribution of significant, if sometimes limited or patchy, archival resources. Investigations carried out from archival records in recent years have yielded remarkable results. The outpouring of information, consisting of previously unpublished documents and research material, has been so profuse that even specialists are finding it hard to keep up. Indeed, the opening of the archives has spurred a change in methodological approaches.¹

Particular attention and the greatest results have come from the study of the Stalinist state's repressive politics, terror, and Gulag system. Motivated to some degree by important political and social concerns, this focus of historiography has important scientific reasons: persecution and terror were clearly the hinge on which Stalinist dictatorship turned. Researchers have long pointed out that no phenomenon or occurrence of the Stalinist period may be understood or adequately explained without taking mass repression duly into account. Studies have quickly left behind the controversies on the proportions of terror, which served as their starting point, concentrating instead on issues such as the nature, aims, and mechanisms of repressive practice, including the processes by which the latter was implemented and increased. It is important to underline that these investigations have focused on the Soviet period as a whole, thus overcoming the traditional tendency in research to concentrate on specific points in time, like 1937.²

¹ "The New Political History," special issue of *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 5 (2004).

² Among more recent publications, see *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga. Konets 1920-kh/pervaia polovina 1950-kh godov. Sobranie dokumentov v 7 tomakh* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004),

Numerous documents have confirmed the thesis that repression operations were greatly centralized during the Stalinist period. Put into action and discontinued based on orders from Moscow, operations were forcibly controlled by the center. In many cases, the latter determined arrest and execution by shooting quotas. The knowledge of these fundamental facts has undermined the positions of those historians (so-called revisionists, belonging in large part to American historiography) who emphasized the spontaneity of terror and accounted for its prevalence by playing up the weakness of the dictatorship, the strained relationship between center and regions, the effects of “terror from below,” and so forth.³

Furthermore, archival documents show that during Stalin’s regime the political use of terror and, more generally, state violence developed on a structure that was much more complex—as regards both the repressive methods used and the relationship between the different categories of victims—than was previously assumed.

The Proportions of Terror

To better understand the essence of the Stalinist dictatorship and its driving forces, it is important to establish at once the approximate size of the overall violence perpetrated by the state, without separating punishments based on “political” criminal articles from those based on

each volume is accompanied by long analytical articles; M. Jansen and N. Petrov, *Stalin’s Loyal Executioner: People’s Commissar Nikolai Ezhov, 1895–1940* (Stanford: Hoover University Press, 2002); O.V. Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag: From Collectivization to the Great Terror* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); V. Khaustov and L. Samuelson, *Stalin, NKVD i repressii 1936–1938 gg.* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009); M. Junge, B. Bonveč, and R. Binner, eds., *Stalinizm v sovetskoi provintsii: 1937–1938 gg. Massovaia operatsiia na osnove prikaza n. 00447* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009); D.R. Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism: Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union, 1924–1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); P. Hagenloh, *Stalin’s Police: Public Order and Mass Repression in the USSR, 1926–1941* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009); D.R. Shearer and V. Khaustov, *Stalin and the Lubianka: A Documentary History of the Political Police and Security Organs in the Soviet Union, 1922–1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015) and others.

³ For an overview of these issues, see H. Kuromiya, “Accounting for the Great Terror,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 53 (2005): 86–101.

“common” ones. Ministerial documents from security agencies depict the following picture.

First, ample recourse to executions by shooting was a typical feature of Stalinist rule. According to official data, between 1930 and 1952, roughly 800,000 people were shot dead, of them 680,000 in 1937–38.⁴ The number of actual victims is much higher when one considers that, in Stalinist security agencies, tortures leading to death were common. Also, in certain periods concentration camps effectively (even though this was not necessarily the intended outcome) became mass extermination camps on account of the very poor life conditions of the people detained in them.

Second, between 1930 and 1952, about 19,000,000 people were sentenced to detainment in camps, colonies, or prisons.⁵ The number of those sentenced to exile has not yet been determined, but it would seem that the figure is in the hundreds of thousands. Specialists estimate that no less than 6 million people were placed in administrative deportation between 1930 and 1952.⁶ For the most part, they were kulaks and individuals belonging to the “punished peoples.”⁷

These figures alone suffice to show the intensity of the repression carried out during the Stalinist dictatorship. On average, during this period, 1,000,000 people were sentenced to execution by shooting, detention, or deportation each year.

⁴ *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga*, vol. I, 608–9. These data are incomplete. They do not include the executions carried out by the army special bodies at the front in 1941–45, for example.

⁵ See A. Kokurin and Iu. Morukov, “Gulag: struktura i kadry,” *Svobodnaia mysl* 12 (2001): 100–101. The authors added the data concerning those convicted as a result of the (generally extrajudicial) trials pursued by the OGPU-NKVD-MVD-MGB to the data resulting from judicial statistics. Yet they did not mention that the data before 1937 pertains exclusively to the Russian Soviet Republic. It can be assumed, however, that this underestimation balances out the overestimation caused by the introduction, in the final estimate of 19,000,000 people, of prisoners convicted a second time or more often.

⁶ V. Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsy v SSSR. 1930–1960 gg.* (Moscow: Nauka, 2003), 281.

⁷ The expression *nakazannyye narody* identifies the mainly Caucasian populations (Chechens, the Kalmyk, the Ingush, and others) deported right after the Second World War for their alleged collaborationism with the Nazi invader. The expression derives from the book of the same title by the historian Aleksandr Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples: The Deportation and Fate of Soviet Minorities at the End of the Second World War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978). More recently, the expression has been extended to all the populations subjected to deportation and repression on ethnic grounds during the Stalinist regime.

To understand more adequately how the Stalinist system and its institutions really functioned, it is important to look also at other means by which state violence was perpetrated.

In addition to condemning roughly 20,000,000 people to execution by shooting or custodial sentences, between 1930 and 1952, USSR's judicial and extrajudicial organs assigned 30,000,000 sentences of different kinds. For the most part, these were sentences that did not involve imprisonment, but forced labor of some kind (either without pay, or for a reduced salary).⁸

Furthermore, the figures relating to many different categories of repressed people, including those sentenced without trial to relatively brief detentions, still have to be quantified. Well-established facts suggest that there were millions of people who were persecuted “casually,” subjected to all the circles of repressive hell, and finally freed—and who, for this reason, are not accounted for in the statistics pertaining to the people convicted of a criminal offence. In time of war, several million Soviet citizens were interned and, effectively detained, were coerced into different kinds of forced labor. At the end of the conflict, millions passed through “filtration and control” camps. Also, it must not be forgotten that Stalinist repressive practice called for several measures of political-social discrimination against the family members of the “enemies of the people” (expulsion from the *rezhimnye mestnosti*,⁹ exclusion from work, and so on).

Based on the calculations outlined above, it can be said that, in a little over two decades of Stalinist rule, no less than 60,000,000 people were subjected, for different reasons, to varying “violent” or “bland” forms of repression.

It is important to complete this list with the victims of the food shortages that repeatedly took place over the years, and particularly with the victims of the famine of 1932–33, which resulted in the death of between 5,000,000 and 7,000,000 people. While disagreeing on the causes of these famines and on their specific features in the different republics of the Soviet Union, most historians who have addressed

⁸ *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga*, vol. I, 610–45.

⁹ The expression *rezhimnaia mestnost* (special security place) referred to locations in which former detainees and their relatives were prohibited from living.

the matter concur that they were fundamentally the result of political decisions.¹⁰ Among other things, the authorities' refusal to give aid to those suffering from hunger and the continued seizure of wheat from starved villages were based on the government's will to bend farmers' opposition to collectivization. Famines were accompanied by mass repressions on a national scale, which further developed in 1937–38 as a part of the operations against “counterrevolutionary national contingents.”

The USSR population fluctuated between 162,000,000 at the beginning of 1937 and 187,000,000 at the beginning of 1953.¹¹ Thus, the data mentioned above is consistent with the conclusion that, during the Stalinist period, a meaningful part of Soviet citizenry suffered different kinds of persecutions and discriminatory measures. In the light of these figures, it does not seem an exaggeration to say that the absolute majority of the population was violently repressed by a privileged minority, which, in turn, also frequently fell victim to terror.

The Mechanisms of Terror

Defining the true proportions of state violence is not a matter of “political accounting” instrumental in one-sidedly discrediting Stalin and Soviet socialism. The figures and facts already verified with absolute precision are sufficient to understand the essence of the Stalinist

¹⁰ An interesting and meaningful debate on the political aspects of hunger has developed around the famous book by R.W. Davies and S.G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931–1933* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). Refer to the exchange of opinions that was set off by M. Ellman's “The Role of Leadership Perceptions and of Intent in the Soviet Famine of 1931–1934,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 57 (2005): 823–841. See also A. Graziosi, *Velikaia krestianskaia voina v SSSR: Bolsheviki i krestiane. 1917–1933* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2008); V.V. Kondrashin, *Golod 1932–1933 godov: Tragediia rossiiskoj derevni* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2008); N.A. Ivinskii, *Golod 1932–1933 godov v SSSR* (Moscow: Sobranie, 2009).

¹¹ Obviously the adult population was much smaller (in 1937, for instance, it was estimated to be roughly 100,000,000). The demographic increase that took place despite the terror, the famines and the losses of war mostly resulted from the annexation of new territories to the USSR (the Baltic countries, Ukraine and Western Belarus, Bessarabia, etc.)

dictatorship. However, a complete study of the dimensions of state violence provides the necessary basis on which to understand the operating mechanisms of the Stalinist system. The figures mentioned above reflect the political priorities of the dictatorship, which criminalized every sphere of socio-economic and political life, all the while relying primarily on violent methods of government, used in place of normal incentives for development. These orientations constituted, each to a different extent, the foundation on which all power and government institutions operated. Unless this context is properly evaluated, a distorted image of political-administrative practice and social development under Stalinist rule is likely to ensue.

Among the more common distortions is the attempt to separate the victims of terror into two distinct classes, one for political detainees and one for “common criminals.” This distinction follows from the articles of the criminal code applied to condemn them. According to security agency ministerial statistics, between 1930 and 1952, roughly 4,000,000 people were arrested in the USSR for “counterrevolutionary criminal acts.”¹² These numbers need to be further verified and confronted with other data. It is wholly possible that they correctly reflect the approximate quantity of people condemned based on “political articles,” who were usually destined to concentration camps or to execution by shooting. However, there is no doubt that they do not reflect the total quantity of those who fell victim to Stalinist arbitrariness. First, these figures do not take into account the deportations of the kulaks and of the “punished peoples,” the persecutions carried out against the family members of the “enemies of the people,” and so forth. Second, those sentenced to imprisonment or to death by shooting on the grounds of non-political penal articles, in many cases, were victims of the dictatorship just as much as the political prisoners. In a huge number of cases, the punishments meted out to those sentenced to incarceration in camps or to execution by shooting were entirely disproportionate to the gravity of their offences. The actual number of camp prisoners condemned for penal crimes was relatively low, particularly when recidivists are factored in. Most detainees were common Soviet citizens

¹² *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga*, vol. I, 608–9.

who had broken exceptionally strict laws, promulgated amid very difficult life conditions, or had fallen into the whirl of repressive campaigns carried out by the regime for demonstrative reasons. Most of them could not be called "criminals" in the usual sense of the word. The extraordinary criminalization of minor offences caused by hardship and the widespread arbitrariness in the enforcement of impossibly violent laws canceled out the boundaries between prisoners condemned for political offences and the huge number of so-called criminals. A significant part of the latter was actually made up of political victims of the regime. The exercise of draconian laws was so extensive that virtually every Soviet citizen was at risk of being put on trial.

The data on the scale of state violence and on the extreme criminalization of all spheres of socio-economic life are the necessary starting point for an inquiry into the social problems and the institutional foundations of the Stalinist regime. Particularly, what warrants investigation is the relationship between state coercion and civil initiative. This is a key category by which to define the characteristics of any political system. In terms more appropriate to the period being discussed, what needs to be studied is the relationship between coercion and "enthusiasm." Knowledge of the widespread use of state violence and coercion requires a reassessment of the extent to which the Stalinist course enjoyed civil support and ideal stimuli played a part, as well as of the true nature of any observed support and collaboration, which, outwardly, might have appeared to indicate conscious political loyalty.

This need is further justified by the research on the history of mass opposition to the regime made possible after the opening of the archives. Events worth mentioning are, first, the revolts of millions of farmers at the beginning of 1930, the strikes of laborers in Ivanovo-Voznesensk in the spring of 1932, the unrest in the countryside during the second phase of collectivization in 1931–32, and so on.¹³ As these and other

¹³ L. Viola, V.P. Danilov, N.A. Ivinskii, and D. Kozlov, eds., *The War Against the Peasantry, 1927–1930: The Tragedy of the Soviet Countryside*, trans. S. Shabad, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); L. Viola, T. McDonald, S.V. Zhuravlev, and A.N. Melnik, eds., *Riazanskaia derevnia v 1929–1930 gg. Khronika golovokruzheniia* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1998); V. Vasil'ev and L. Viola, *Kollektivizatsiia i krestianskoe soprotivlenie na Ukraine (noiabr' 1929–mart 1930 gg.)* (Vinnytsia: Logos, 1997); L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin*:

events make clear, fierce opposition by the Party and a significant part of the population accompanied the rise of the Stalinist system. It was a particular continuation, or at least a repercussion, of the civil war. Stalin never received a mandate to rule following free elections. His revolution was imposed on the country more than it was accepted by it. The strength of the Bolshevik party-state did not rest on its intrinsic might, but on the fact that, right from the beginning (because of the havoc wreaked by revolutions and wars) and increasingly thereafter, it opposed a society progressively weakened and demoralized by terror—a society that had lost cohesion, institutions independent of power, alternative leaders, moral authorities, and the will to react.

Archival documentation allows the study of the mechanisms by which the country was involved in the second revolution, the Stalinist revolution, including the mechanisms of centralization from above. As is common knowledge, historians engaged in the study of available sources, such as the Smolensk archive, have long described a phenomenon contrary to common expectation. Indeed, the party's lower level administrative structures were shown to be relatively weak, particularly in quantitative terms. Can this circumstance be viewed as a sign of the regime's weakness, and as an indication of its inability to control the situation at a lower level? The acceptance of this point of view engendered a number of studies that have described Stalinist political practice as the result of the union of spontaneous forces and processes.¹⁴ In my opinion, a more thorough study of Stalinist political practice challenges this approach. While allowing for a certain degree of spontaneity (characterized as "excesses" in Stalinist parlance), a high degree of centralization of the system may be conclusively determined.

Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); L. Viola, ed., *Contending with Stalinism: Soviet Power and Popular Resistance in the 1930s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ In recent years J.A. Getty has remained a staunch follower of this hypothesis. For example, see J.A. Getty and O.V. Naumov, eds., *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); J.A. Getty, "Pre-election Fever: The Origins of the 1937 Mass Operations," in *The Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence Under Stalin*, ed. J. Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 216–38.

Operative methods of centralization existed whereby the opposition resulting from specific circumstances, such as the vastness of the country and the concentration of an increasingly large part of the party-state apparatus in urban centers, could be overcome. The archives make it possible to analyze these methods—particularly the use of mass campaigns as a foundation for Stalinist political and administrative practice—in great detail and under every aspect.

On closer inspection, the campaigns that jointly formed the essence of the Stalinist regime's politics were carried out following a script perfected time after time. This involved, in succession: the putting forward of objectives by the center; apparatus mobilization, with extraordinary methods and no regard for its devastating consequences or effects, in order to realize these objectives; the carrying out of the campaign until a crisis was reached, at the height of which the limits of the retreat were set, and local officials were condemned for their "excesses"; the launch of countercampaigns aimed at stabilizing the situation and consolidating results. These practices brought about the destruction of huge material resources and numerous victims, but proved effective as far as the functioning of the Stalinist system was concerned: they were used to compensate the weakness of traditional incentives for development, like economic interest and social initiative. Moreover, these practices kept the apparatus in a state of continuous mobilization, ensuring a high level of centralization.

It is my belief that a further inquiry into the mechanisms of the dictatorship would allow the elaboration of a more adequate point of view, which might overcome the limits of the "totalitarian" conception, as well as those of the "revisionism" that has emerged as its obverse.

Turning now to a higher level in ordinary administrative management, significant results may be recorded in the study of the political decision-making mechanisms of the entire Soviet state. The documentation has made it possible to continue to analyze administrative localism within the Stalinist system. Thanks to the new documents that have been found, it has been ascertained that the outbreak of numerous conflicts at the highest echelons of power was actually a method by which the interests of the different bureaucratic structures could be realized. The infighting within bureaucracy was an important

mechanism for the intensification of the politics of industrialization and the unequal distribution of capital investments.¹⁵

The finding of a significant number of documents from the Politburo, the Sovnarkom and the Council of Ministers has allowed, in recent years, to study both the overall functioning of these higher institutions of power and their specific activity in relation to individual directives. As proven by research, Stalin's personal dictatorship, strengthened after the repression of the nomenklatura (which also comprised the members of the Politburo), inevitably and continually reproduced features typical of oligarchic power, which, in effect, disavowed it. There were certain factors that contributed to this "natural" oligarchization. While lacking political independence, Stalin's close collaborators did enjoy well-defined ministerial autonomy for the resolution of operative issues inherent to their spheres of competence. This tendency was accentuated as Stalin inevitably withdrew from active participation in the leadership of the country. Thus, within the power groups of the Politburo and of the Council of Ministers Presidium, semicollective decision-making processes were gradually instituted.¹⁶

In general, during the last few years of Stalin's life, it became particularly evident that the dictator was a peculiar force that dominated an entirely self-sufficient power and decision-making system. This was the fundamental prerequisite for the quick transition from the dictatorship to a new oligarchy. In a way that by then was independent of the dictator, local and administrative influence naturally converted into political influence.

It would be wrong, however, to interpret the tendencies outlined above as proof of the theory of the "weak dictator." Well spread while Stalin was still alive and perpetuated to this day, echoes of the "weak dictator" theory are the result of scholarly inventions or, at best, of

¹⁵ E.A. Rees, ed., *Decision-Making in the Stalinist Command Economy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); P. Gregory, *The Political Economy of Stalinism: Evidence from the Soviet Secret Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Y. Gorlizki and O.V. Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945–1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

exceedingly free interpretations of the documents.¹⁷ No decisions of any significance have ever been found that were made without Stalin's knowledge, let alone that were contrary to his opinion.

As many documents attest, Stalin represented an independent function of the political system that, not by chance, bore his name. The decisions made on Stalin's initiative, which reflected his personal manias, had a profound and in many cases predetermined impact on the development of the country and of state politics. At least some of Stalin's chief priorities became the priorities of the state at large.

First among these was Stalin's penchant for solving all problems with repressive administrative methods. Considering the political traditions of Bolshevism and that the new state was born in revolution and civil war, this is not entirely unexpected. Stalin, however, exacerbated this tradition and charged it with singular atrocity and fanaticism.¹⁸ New sources confirm a point of view that could have been considered settled long ago: the dictatorship itself could not withstand the blow of Stalinism on account of its excessively repressive nature. Stalinism gave rise to exaggerations and excesses that were unnecessary to support the system's efficiency and went so far beyond what was needed that they not only failed to strengthen the regime, they actually weakened it.

Like other dictators, Stalin had the utmost confidence in his own foresight and infallibility. In political practice, this led to an exceptional obstinacy and to an extreme resistance to compromise. Although there are sufficient elements to speak of double pragmatism on the part of Stalin (one in internal affairs and one in foreign politics), the greatest signs of instability in the Stalinist system can for the most part be

¹⁷ In contemporary Russia, these theories, which despite their scientific pretensions are really arguments at the mercy of neo-Stalinization, are propagated by Iu.N. Zhukov, *Inoi Stalin: politicheskie reformy v SSSR v 1933–1937 gg.* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2003). His work is disseminated by Stalinists. Zhukov draws his general framework from Western "revisionists," including, in part, Getty himself. Yet his work makes no mention of this.

¹⁸ Documents of great import stressing Stalin's personal participation in penal politics were published in a four-volume work by V.N. Khaustov. The second volume is particularly interesting in this regard; see V.N. Khaustov, ed., *Lubianka. Stalin i Glavnoe upravlenie gosbezopasnosti NKVD. 1937–1938* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond "Demokratiia," 2004).

understood in the context of his “crisis pragmatism.” Stalin agreed to limited concessions, devoid of consequences, only after things had reached a dead end, and the crisis had become severe enough to be dangerous. It was precisely at these times that Stalin made decisions that were at variance with the “general line” and yet were presented as if they were an integral part of the latter. These measures were usually more effective than the ones they replaced, and ultimately saved the regime.

After all, the existence of non-Stalinist variants of development for the system thoroughly explains the events that followed the death of the dictator. Stalin’s successors, in the few months in which they didn’t have to face specific tasks, abandoned many of the excesses of Stalinism and, more importantly, its exceedingly repressive character and economic adventurism. This gave the system a renewed quality, although many of its basic elements remained unchanged.

Stalinism and Modernization

Admittedly, studying the logic, variability, and degree of efficiency of Stalinist politics requires a great deal of effort and the accumulation of a huge quantity of information. Nevertheless, the facts already ascertained make it possible to discredit the hypothesis that justifies Stalinism historically as an inevitable method for a specific and delayed modernization. In response to reconstructions that characterized Stalinist politics as exceedingly repressive and devastating in its effects, in recent years there have been unfortunate attempts to validate the effectiveness of Stalinist “management” and the inevitability of bloodshed as a way of greasing the wheels of the “progressive course of history.” These ideological and simplistic clichés do not follow from serious research, but from entirely irresponsible operations.

Clearly the political system engendered by two wars and the Bolshevik Revolution could only be authoritarian and violent. However, this does not mean that Stalinist tyranny was the only possible version of such authoritarianism. From this point of view, the discussions on the disputes in the party and the possibility that political lines alternative

to the ones that prevailed existed within Bolshevik authoritarianism, ignored in recent years, have not lost their validity. On the contrary, thanks to the many new documents that have been uncovered, it is now possible to continue the important studies conducted on these issues prior to the opening of the archives.¹⁹ The new material further complicates the picture of the struggle for power at the highest echelons of the party.²⁰ Stalin's victory in the competition for political supremacy appears as neither simple nor inevitable.

Even less inevitable and contingent on the influence of objective, subjective, and casual circumstances was the affirmation, fruit of improvisations, of the Stalinist politics of the Great Leap Forward, which entailed top-down industrialization and forced collectivization. Attempts to present Stalin as the only promoter of industrial development, which are widespread in contemporary Russia, appear wholly unfounded. In reality, the promoters of industrialization were all opponents of Stalin, not to mention that industrial modernization would in any case have been carried out by any non-Bolshevik government. The stark juxtaposition, in common historical conscience as well as in the works of many historians and journalists, between "Stalin's programs" and those of the "Right Opposition"—which sought to bring about the industrial leap and continue the New Economic Policy (NEP)—usually deforms the real situation in its concrete historical development. The differences lay in the methods by which the outcome was to be produced. On the one hand, the loyalty of the leading figures of the right to a relatively balanced economic policy did not mean that they wished to defer industrialization forever, or that they were not prepared to take action on the NEP. On the other hand, Stalin's high-sounding demands, revolutionary and adventurist in essence, aimed at ignoring economic feasibility, do not necessarily amount to Stalinist policies' being optimal, or capable of actually setting off a real and factual acceleration of industrialization.

¹⁹ Among others, see S.F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888–1938* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

²⁰ V.P. Danilov, A.Iu. Vatlin, and O.V. Khlevniuk, eds., *Kak lomali NEP: stenogrammy plenumov CK VKP(b), 1928–1929 gg. V 5-ti tt.* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond "Demokratiia," 2000).

The contrast between Stalin's forced industrialization and the "continuation of the NEP" supported by Nikolai Bukharin and Alexei Rykov corresponds, in fact, to the contrast between an implemented course of action (the one proposed by Stalin, who changed and corrected it more than once) and a course of action that was never realized by the Right Opposition. The latter only put forward general principles, which were never acted out because they could not be under the circumstances.

In reality, at the time of their struggle for power, neither Stalin nor the Right Opposition had a clear understanding of the concrete steps that needed to be taken, even in the short term. The Right Opposition never viewed its insistence on the continuation of the NEP in dogmatic terms. As a matter of fact, in the few years of its existence, the NEP had shown great flexibility and variability. Stalin was even less prepared to make responsible and effective decisions. His maneuvers at the time of the struggle for power fully confirmed the words Bukharin used to describe him during a conversation with Kamanev, in July 1928: "He is an unprincipled intriguer, who subordinates everything to the preservation of his own power. He changes his theory according to whom he needs to get rid of."²¹ Stalin's actions were based on Lenin's "first engage in a serious battle and then see what happens" approach. In other words, Stalin gave absolute priority to the taking of power, over its effective construction.

Stalin's "great leap forward" blatantly proved that this new course was grounded in politics and did not stem from real economic necessity or an interest in accelerating economic development. In evaluating Stalinist policy, it is extraordinarily important to take the crucial difference between slogans and reality into account. Announcements of great plans were countered by an irrational and messy dispersion, and often destruction, of resources in industrial projects. Under the slogan of a "progressive" though forced social reordering, productive forces in the countryside were devastated. And, what's more, the mechanization that took place was totally inadequate to accelerate economic development. With regard to the results achieved, the Stalinist leap of the first five-year plan took the country backward.

²¹ Ibid., vol. IV, 560.

For some time now, historians have defined the criminal nature of the Stalinist decisions regarding the carrying out of collectivization and dekulakization, which resulted in mass extermination. Furthermore, they have proven the economic adventurism and destructive character of the Stalinist leap in the early 1930s. Attempts have been made to assess and quantify the tragic losses of those years. According to H. Hunter and J. Szyrmer's well-known evaluations, without collectivization Soviet agriculture would have reached higher productivity, while avoiding the enormous number of victims and the destructions that plunged the countryside into crisis and degradation.²² The authors of the latest study of the Stalinist economic model have presented similar findings. In their own words: "A Tsarist economy, even in our conservative version assuming that it would not experience any decline in frictions, would have achieved a rather similar structure of the economy and levels of production as Stalin's economy by 1940. The short-run (1928–1940) costs of Stalin's policies are very significant for an economy in a peaceful period."²³

Many of those who participated, many years ago, in the debates that ensued from Hunter's work have confirmed his conclusions. Even skeptics have agreed on the importance of studying the results of Stalinist policy in the context of the other development variants that had manifested themselves and were rejected for political and subjective reasons.²⁴ Unfortunately, these studies have not made much headway beyond this point. Evidently, this has resulted in part from a general decline of interest in political-economic history, and from the fact that the younger generation of historians has shifted its attention to socio-cultural issues.

²² H. Hunter and J.M. Szyrmer, *Faulty Foundations: Soviet Economic Policies, 1928–1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

²³ A. Cheremukhin, M. Golosov, S. Guriev, and A. Tsyvinski, "Was Stalin Necessary for Russia's Economic Development?" National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 19425, Cambridge, MA, September 2013), 51.

²⁴ See "Sovremennye kontseptsii agrarnogo razvitiia: teoreticheskii seminar," *Otechestvennaia istoriia* (1995), no. 6.

Conclusions

A watered-down representation of the qualitative parameters of the Stalinist model, its degree of maximum efficiency, and the real results of its use has favored the spread, in contemporary Russia, of a mythical idea of Stalinism—a Stalinism that never actually existed. Repeating time and time again the Stalinist slogan on the need to “reach and surpass” other countries, the mass media and many historians ignore the well-founded theory claiming that the Stalinist model did not speed up the country’s development, but rather slowed it down. Some facts—like the catastrophic failure of the first five-year plan, which deprived the country of a significant part of its national wealth, and caused a famine of impossible proportions in a time of peace characterized by relatively good harvests—have long been pushed to the background of Russian historiography and of the public opinion’s common understanding of the country’s past. Conversely, the foolish Stalinist slogan on the “fulfillment of the five-year plan in four years” is repeated. Haughty reflections on the lack of alternatives and variants of development disregard an overt fact, namely, that in practice such alternatives were realized within the very Stalinist model. An example of this may be found in the “moderate” policies carried out during the second five-year plan, whose results were far better than those reaped by the adventurism of the early 1930s. There is no reason to believe that the “moderate” policies of the mid-1930s could not have been put to use during the first five-year plan. The only reason this relatively more reasonable alternative was rejected (and some party leaders had indeed tried to formulate political alternatives) lies in the politics espoused by the country’s management under Stalin, in his incompetence, and in his political adventurism. The “efficient management” theory is contradicted by the incredible losses brought on by the Great Terror, which have not yet been quantified (presuming they can be). It is further contradicted by the fact that, because of Stalin’s miscalculations, almost his whole army was destroyed during the first few years of the war (a well-known and studied fact), as were one-third of prewar productive funds, accumulated at such a high cost in terms of human lives and privations. The results of

Stalin's politics in the final years of his regime—which, judging from certain facts, were marked by a profound systemic crisis—are almost entirely ignored. The manifestation of this crisis was the main reason Stalin's successors immediately refused to continue carrying out the most odious aspects of his system.

Only a country as rich in natural and human resources as the Soviet Union could physically withstand “modernization” in the Stalinist variant, and—to use a subtle metaphor—not only pay the “price” of its socio-economic experiments, but actually yield visible results. However, the importance of these results was mostly strategic. According to an aphorism widely circulating in contemporary Russia, attributed to Churchill (who, incidentally, never said such a thing), Stalin took over the country when it was still using the wooden plow and left it equipped with atomic weapons. In truth, Stalin left Russia with both atomic weapons and the wooden plow, which is precisely why the strategic model of “modernization” created by Stalin was doomed to failure. The hypertrophy of the repressive state generated by Stalinist politics, an economic relations system that rejected efficiency and innovations, and many other factors left a long-lasting mark on the development of the country, which was condemned to reproduce an ever-delayed model for advancement.

All the facts that are now known make it possible to recognize beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Stalinist dictatorship was an extremely violent political regime, capable of reaching its goals mainly by way of terror and abuse. Becoming aware and acknowledging this basic fact must be the starting point for the further development of research on the other key aspects of the Stalinist system.

First among these is the issue of the relative autonomy of social processes, and the considerable diffusion of social phenomena opposing the dictatorship. Second, there is the crucial issue of the war waged jointly by the USSR and Western democracies against Nazism. These very important factors had a strong influence on the character of the Stalinist system as a whole, and facilitated the relatively quick dismantling of its key concepts within a few months of Stalin's death. They make it possible to challenge the absolute identification of the

Stalinist regime with Soviet society. And they allow to characterize the struggle against Nazism as a heroic fact in the history of the generation of the 1930s and 1940s—a fact that, objectively, contributed to modify the legitimacy of the Stalinist and post-Stalinist political regime.

Likewise, the more determined and aggressive attempts to deny or belittle the repressive and criminal character of Stalinism, look past and ignore the nature of the dictatorship, and underline exclusively the victory over Nazism and the allegedly “modernizing” aspects of the Stalinist revolution are unacceptable. These attempts deform the essence of Soviet history from the late 1920s to the early 1950s.

No history can avoid paying the price of history.

The “National Question” in the Soviet Union

ANDREA GRAZIOSI

As his works prove, and as those who knew him remember, Victor Zaslavsky was sensitive with regard to the “national question” in the USSR.¹ Nor could it have been otherwise, given the part this question played in his life. After the war, his mother, a medical officer in Leningrad during the Nazi siege, endured persecution in the dark season of Stalinist “anti-cosmopolitanism.” And he too was barred from carrying out the studies he loved because he was a Jew. Later, his deep knowledge of the country and its diversity—made possible by his work as a mining technician, which he had been forced to pursue because of the barriers placed on his desired path—strengthened his awareness of the importance of the “national question” in the USSR. At the time, a large part of Europe’s left, as well as many specialists of Soviet history and society, preferred to underestimate this issue, or to ignore it altogether.

Victor arrived in the West because of his “nationality,” and not by choice, but on account of the marginalization he had suffered for his association with the dissent’s cultural circles, and because some relatives of his had asked to emigrate from the USSR. Once in the West, however, he was able to analyze with unprejudiced intelligence both the “Jewish question” and the part “affirmative action” mechanisms among nationalities played in the stability of the Soviet system, as well

¹ This chapter is a slightly revised version of the part dedicated to the “national question” in the *Questions et débats* section of my *Histoire de l’Urss* (Paris: PUF, 2010; Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), to which I have added some needed bibliographical notes. For more information, please refer to the annotated bibliography I prepared for that volume, available at www.h-net.org/~russia/teach/graziosi.html and www.fas.harvard.edu/%7Ehpcws/biblioguide.htm. The English-language version is published here with the permission of the Presses Universitaires de France.

as in its crisis. He owed his fame among Western Sovietologists to his keen analysis of the reasons behind the decision of a large part of the Jewish community to leave the USSR. In my opinion, his pages dedicated to the mechanisms that regulated the “national question” in the Brezhnev “stagnation” era may be counted among his most acute and important. They are comparable with those on the role of the working classes, and of miners in particular, in the crisis of the Soviet system.²

Although the “national question” played a crucial role in both the birth and the history of the USSR, the studies dedicated to this issue were long considered marginal. They later experienced a boom in the 1980s, until finally, after the post-Soviet republics gained their independence, this question became one of the main foci, if not the main focus, of inquiry. Lenin and Stalin, however, had paid extraordinary attention to it right from the beginning. Marxism, which they espoused, while boasting about its internationalism, suffered from a dearth of indications on this matter (as it did on the matter of peasants). This allowed Lenin and Stalin to elaborate, precisely in this field, some of their more original policies, and to overcome the traditional opposition between socialism and nationalism. Taking their cue from Engels—who, later in life, inspired by the Irish case, had changed his stance and gone so far as to maintain that national liberation was a precondition for social liberation—Lenin and Stalin, mindful of the imperial and oppressive nature of the Russian state, had defended heterodox and innovative views since before 1917. Such views had found expression in Stalin’s *Marxism and the National Question* (1913), which took into account the claims of the national movements of “peoples without history” and the liberal theories on nation and nationalism, acknowledging the weight of language and culture alongside that of economy and social roles.

Fruitfully contaminated with the evolutionist core of Marxism, these ideas linked the different forms of the “national question” with

² His essays on Jewish emigration were later systematized in V. Zaslavsky and R.J. Brym, *Soviet-Jewish Emigration and Soviet Nationality Policy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983). The year before, Zaslavsky had published *The Neo-Stalinist State: Class, Ethnicity, and Consensus in Soviet Society* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1982), which, starting with its title, emphasized the importance he rightly attributed to the “national question.”

the historical stages that Marxism called for. National claims were thus considered legitimate at a certain level of development, and it became necessary for revolutionaries to provide an answer to them, as proven by Lenin's philo-Ukrainianism in 1914. The latter was truly extraordinary among Russian revolutionaries and democrats, many of whom had opposed even Polish demands.³

The Birth of the USSR

Lenin's innovations became apparent in 1917 when he supported the right of peoples to self-determination. Like his endorsement of the claims of peasants, this aroused protests from Bolshevik cadres. Lenin, however, won the favor of the former empire's national movements, which, even when relations with Moscow took a turn for the worse, continued to believe that Bolshevism was preferable to the "Russia one and indivisible" of the Whites. At the same time, the new state's attack on wealthy classes increased its prestige in the peripheries, where such classes were often alien in origin. Also, the appeal of an ideology that promised a world without social or national distinctions strengthened the new power's hold on a section of the most generous youth.

This made possible the foundation of a new multinational creature in place of the old empire. With the exception of the Kingdom of Serbians, Croats and Slovenians, and of Tito's Yugoslavia, it was a unique case in twentieth-century Europe. This opportunity, however, was understood and grasped amid and by virtue of defeats. The one inflicted on Moscow in 1919 following the social and national revolt of the Ukrainian countryside, for instance, triggered debates that proved

³ J.V. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, in *Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages, [1913] 1952) vol. 2: 1907–1913, 300–81; O. Bauer, *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1907] 2000); R. Rosdolsky, *Friedrich Engels and the "Non-Historic Peoples"* (Glasgow: Critique, 1986); R. Gallissot, "Nazione e nazionalità nei dibattiti del movimento operaio," in *Storia del marxismo*, ed. E.J. Hobsbawm et al., vol. 2: *Il marxismo nell'età della Seconda Internazionale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979), 787–864; N. Pianciola, "Gruppi senza etnicità: alla ricerca delle nazioni in Asia Centrale," *Storica* 43–45 (2009): 257–311.

crucial to the form and substance of the new Soviet state. From these, Lenin drew the conviction that the new power should appropriate nation-building policies based on culture, language, and so forth, previously the prerogative of nationalist forces. Stalin supported this conviction and went so far as to say that “alien” cities surrounded by a countryside inhabited by a different nationality were destined to be conquered by it, and that Moscow should favor this process. The two leaders were later at odds on the form the new state should be given. To the federal Russia proposed by Stalin, who echoed the requests of most national movements up to 1917, Lenin countered his Soviet Union, which banned—with good reason—the adjective “Russian” from its name and aimed to be an example and a guiding light for the colonies’ national liberation movements. Indeed, Lenin clearly recognized their importance.

The Chinese box setup of the Soviet federation, founded on a language-based nationality criterion, derived from the decision made in 1922. National republics—and the autonomous republics, regions, provinces, cities, and autonomous districts that constituted their many levels—and their “titular nationalities” enjoyed real rights (*korenizatsiia* or indigenization policies). The Party, however, continued to be a monolith, only apparently federal, and was the core and instrument of strong imperial features. In some periods, such features decidedly gained the upper hand, and thus the rights enjoyed by titular nations were subject to extreme fluctuations, for they were understood to be a part of a history destined to make socialist substance prevail over national form. The latter’s presence and strength makes it impossible, however, to boil the Soviet experience down to the imperial paradigm alone. That Stalin himself, who had opposed Lenin’s solution, was unable to overcome it, and that the USSR could never be reduced to Russia, prove this point. Every time it was attempted, starting in 1919 in Ukraine, problems surfaced that Moscow was unable to solve. This ensured, even in times of apparent tranquility, that the “national question” remained one of the untangled knots of the Soviet system.

In the 1920s, efforts to define the Chinese boxes that the USSR should be made of, and to determine their boundaries, gave rise to debates and animated conflicts among Moscow politicians, republic leaders, ethnographers, and statisticians. Many of the problems that

emerged periodically throughout Soviet history, and toward its end, were posed at this time. These debates—which resulted in some 200 peoples (*narodnosti*) being identified in 1926 on the grounds of language, degree of development, and so forth (a number later revised to 172 in 1927)—were not given the attention they deserved in the West. Only interested observers, like the Polish leader Józef Piłsudski or the Georgian leader Noe Zhordania, grasped the novelty of the Soviet experiment, attested to by the booming with the New Economic Policy of a number of national communisms, of which the Ukrainian was the most important. As Zhordania wrote, the Bolsheviks were making “nations without history progress, placing them on the road to rebirth. Ukraine, for example, was created under our very eyes.”⁴

The cultural reflections of this policy were likewise noteworthy. The historian Mikhail Nikolaevich Pokrovsky, who interpreted Russian history as a history of imperial conquest and oppression of peoples ultimately freed by the revolution, was countered by the Georgian linguist Nicholas Yakovlevich Marr, whose theories verged on charlatanry. Anticipating the debates that developed in the West at the end of the twentieth century, he accused European linguists of complicity “in the oppression of eastern peoples” and Indo-European philology of being a pseudoscience constructed to perpetuate Western dominion over oppressed peoples. The latter’s mental structure, he maintained, differed from that expressed by the dominant languages of master nations, equated in their turn with dominant classes. Ethnic groups thus became a socio-economic concept, and came to be connected with a most peculiar brand of Marxism.⁵

⁴ B. Krawchenko, *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), III. R. Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx Versus Friedrich List* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); R.G. Suny and T. Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); T. Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); J.E. Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918–1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

⁵ M.N. Pokrovsky, *Russia in World History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970); G. Enteen, *The Soviet Scholar-Bureaucrat* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University

The space made for previously oppressed nations, and especially for Ukrainians, up to 1929, caused more than a little discontent among Russian urban classes and within the party. This dissatisfaction emerged in the controversies between Yuri Larin and Ukrainian leaders. Stalin's answer was to assign Ukrainian-majority territories to the Russian Republic, a rare case in that decade, and to compel the more determined national communist leaders to resign. But the Russian question could not be solved within the Soviet framework. For the latter not to be upset, Russians could not be given the right to their own party, to their own academy of science, or even to their own capital. To do so would have drained the central Soviet institutions—which by definition were not Russian—of any real meaning, and it would have alarmed the peoples recuperated thanks to Lenin's intuitions.

The Stalin Years

The launch of the Great Turn in 1929 caused the partial upending of the policies adopted in 1922–23 in the national field. This change was more pronounced in the western republics—where national communism was more developed and closer to a sensitive border and thus believed to be more dangerous—than among the eastern and northern ones. As attested to by the trials against some of the more important local intellectuals (Ukrainian, Belarusian, and so on), accused of nationalism, it was the high culture of these nationalities that was under fire. Moscow signaled that a well-defined limit to indigenization must not be overstepped so as to avoid the risk of threatening Russian dominance, the glue holding the new state together.

In the following years, the clashes with the peasants, and the resistance to his policies on the part of some (particularly Ukrainians), led Stalin to take an increasingly centralist and repressive turn. Once again, it was the western republics that bore the brunt of this. In Ukraine, famine was accompanied by massive repression of teachers, cultural

Press, 1978); V.M. Alpatov, *Istoriia odnogo mifa: Marr i Marrizm* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991); Y. Slezkine, "N.Ia. Marr and the National Origins of Soviet Ethnogenetics," *Slavic Review* 4 (1996): 826–62.

functionaries, and others, viewed as the result of and the vehicle for a "wrong" indigenization. In Belarus, the measures taken were similar, if somewhat less severe, while in the Russian Republic, the rights of the vast Ukrainian minority were lifted, and a Russification policy was set in motion. However, this shift and the link between the Ukrainian famine and national repression were not understood by Western observers, with the exception of some journalists and of the diplomatic representatives of Italy, Poland, Germany, and so forth.

Likewise, few understood another consequence of this change in the national field—namely, the decision to deport, for security reasons, those Soviet citizens whose national origin was seen as treacherous, and who in theory might have looked to a foreign state from frontier territories and sensitive cities like Leningrad. The decision, which indicated that the balance between social and ethnic criteria for repression was tipping, coincided with the passportization process of 1933–34, and continued to be in effect in the following years, affecting people of nine nationalities. Some, including ethnic Koreans, were simply resettled in the interior of the Union. Others, like Soviet citizens of Polish, German, and Finnish descent, became the target of the mass operations of 1937–38.

This is the backdrop against which the Russian national identity and the tsarist past were rehabilitated, a process heralded in 1935 by the concept of a "brotherhood of peoples" among the nationalities of the USSR, based on the understanding that the Russian people was the "elder brother" in this brotherhood. This rehabilitation was perceived in the West, where it became one of the cornerstones of the interpretations of the mid-decade cultural change dubbed the "great retreat." Conversely, the continuation of a limited, but real, policy of support to non-Russian peoples' nation building, particularly in the East and in Central Asia, went relatively uncommented. There were precise limits to this policy, however. The new elites in-the-making needed fully to comprehend that Moscow and Russian were the only available points of entry into high culture, and that national culture had to be kept within the bounds of folklore and traditional customs. In the western regions and especially in Ukraine—which was governed by the Russian Khrushchev—these limits were even stricter. Yet here too republican institutions continued to exist. Indeed, in 1939 official

propaganda exploited Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalisms to justify the new partitioning of Poland following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and put forward the notion that it was a matter of completing the unification process of Ukrainian and Belarusian territories with those oppressed by Poland (in the same spirit, Vilnius was later granted to Lithuanians).

This exploitation of non-Russian nationalism continued throughout the war, until Soviet victory became a certainty. Then, the new surge in the promotion of the Russian people and of Russian nationalism, evident from the onset of the conflict, obscured everything. Whereas peoples accused of collaborating with the Germans were punished with deportation or—if this was impossible, as in the case of Ukraine—with suspicion and repression, Stalin openly celebrated Russians, and, in his famous toast at the end of the war, ascribed the victory to them. Between 1945 and 1953, this celebration became the linchpin of the regime's rhetoric, marked by an increasingly "anticosmopolitan" exaltation of the Russian genius, leading to overt anti-Semitism after 1948. In 1950, overturning old Bolshevik interpretations of the Tsarist empire as a "prison of the peoples," the magazine *Bolshevik* claimed that Russian penetration in Central Asia and in the Caucasus, far from having been negative and imperial in character, had been a factor of progress. The following year, the matter was further addressed in *Voprosy istorii*, where the progressive nature of the union of local nations with Russia was flaunted. Revolts against the Russian colonial presence were described as reactionary, while tsarist expansionism was portrayed as essentially defensive. Even then, however, given the multinational nature of the state, Russian nationalism could not entirely supplant Soviet nationalism in official discourse. As noted by Franco Venturi, then cultural attaché at the Italian embassy in Moscow, despite the excesses of the Great Russian nationalist rhetoric, the "national problem" continued "to be alive," as proven by the paradox whereby, in contemporary usage, the term "national" referred to non-Russian nationalities.⁶

⁶ A. Nekrich, *Forsake Fear: Memoirs of an Historian* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1991); P. Blitstein, "Nation-Building or Russification? Obligatory Russian Instruction in the Soviet

Western observers and politicians also noticed the severity of the national conflicts that took place in the territories annexed following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, where a ruthless partisan war was fought until the early 1950s, and where Moscow even used the Orthodox Church to repress national churches, including the Uniate Church in western Ukraine. In fact, attempts were made to exploit this instability from a political and military point of view. Meanwhile, Kennan elaborated his containment policy precisely reflecting on the fragility of the Soviet imperial system, which in Eastern Europe had bit off more than it could chew, ingurgitating elements of instability that were thus transmitted from the annexed territories into the Soviet Union proper.

The sensitivity to the "national question" culminated in the 1950s, and served as the background for the first wave of studies on Soviet national policies. Made up of often remarkable and long unsurpassed works, this early research confirms the need for a reassessment of the historiographic production of the 1950s. In 1951, Firuz Kazemzadeh published his study on the civil war in Transcaucasia, followed in 1952 by John Reshetar's study on the Ukrainian revolution of 1917–20. In 1955, John Armstrong's work on Ukrainian nationalism in 1939–45 was issued.⁷ The year before, Richard Pipes published *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, based on interviews to many of the leading figures of the national governments in place at the time of the civil war, still alive in exile. Pipes concluded that the USSR, while revolutionary in its foreign policy, was a rigidly conservative regime when it came to its domestic policy, and had more in common with the absolutism of Nicholas I than with the utopias envisioned by nineteenth-century revolutionaries. Yet, with great foresight, he also noted that "by granting the minorities extensive linguistic autonomy and by placing the national-territorial principle at the base of the state's political administration,

Non-Russian Schools, 1938–1953," in *A State of Nations*, 253–274; A. Graziosi, "Nazione, socialismo, cosmopolitismo. L'Unione Sovietica nell'evoluzione di Franco Venturi," in *Franco Venturi e la Russia*, ed. A. Venturi (Milan, Feltrinelli, 2006), 133–66.

⁷ F. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917–1921)* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951); J. Reshetar, *The Ukrainian Revolution, 1917–1920: A Study in Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952); J.A. Armstrong, *Ukrainian Nationalism, 1939–1945* (Englewood, CO: Ukrainian Academy Press, [1955] 1990).

the communists gave constitutional recognition to the multinational structure of the Soviet population. In view of the importance which language and territory have for the development of national consciousness . . . this purely formal feature of the Soviet Constitution may well prove to have been historically one of the most consequential aspects of the formation of the Soviet Union.”⁸

Despite Frank Lorimer’s work on Soviet demography, the West underestimated the war’s devastating impact on the USSR, and the weakening of the Slavic population it brought on. Little studied were also the changes in the population structure of the Soviet Union’s many Republics following the conflict and Shoah, the famines (the 1946–47 famine, for instance, was largely ignored), repressions, and migrations, whether forced or encouraged by Moscow (like the Russian migration to the Baltic Republics, to Ukraine, and to Central Asia).⁹

The USSR of Khrushchev and Brezhnev

Stalin’s death loosened the grip of Russian nationalism on official Soviet discourse, making room for the interests of non-Russian nationalities. While the liquidation of Beria slowed the process, it did not stop it. At least until 1957, republican leaders witnessed an increase in their powers, and “punished peoples” took advantage of de-Stalinization to regain some of their rights. At first, therefore, the promotion of the concept of “Soviet people” advocated by Khrushchev, who even conjured up the “friendship of peoples” image, did not violate the interests of nationalities. These coexisted with a rhetoric grounded in a non-ethnic vision of Soviet identity, associated with values of progress and optimism.

In 1958, however, in conjunction with Khrushchev’s “little leap forward,” the promotion of Soviet identity came to coincide with the

⁸ R. Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917–1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, [1954] 1997), 296–97.

⁹ F. Lorimer, *The Population of the Soviet Union: History and Prospects* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1946).

promotion of Russian identity and did clash with those interests. This was all the more true given that to achieve socialist modernity the USSR aimed at homogenization, a process Khrushchev believed he could accelerate. Indeed, the data from the 1959 census supported his conviction that the different nationalities of the Union had increasingly been "fused" into a single people. This was a necessary step on the road to communism, which Khrushchev thought to be within reach. The main battleground was the planned education reform. The latter made more room for the teaching of Russian, defined as the indispensable means of exchange. The internal Soviet debate soon reached national émigré communities, and quickly focused on the matter of language. In the following years, this issue became the cornerstone of the new national discourses in the Baltic Republics, as well as in the Caucasus and in Ukraine. During the 22nd Congress, Khrushchev promised to build communism and opposed these discourses announcing that the USSR had witnessed the birth of a new "historical community" of peoples, the *sovetskii narod*, formed by different nations endowed with common features. The list of these features echoed Stalin's inventory of 1913, and included a common homeland, the same economic foundation and social structure, Marxist-Leninist ideology, and the spiritual and psychological affinity expressed by the shared aim of communism. What was missing, though, was language, deemed the most important feature of all.

The question of language was thus returning to the forefront in the USSR. Meanwhile, the West was under the impression that the attempts to exploit nationality in the Cold War had failed. Owing to the intellectual prestige of modernization theories, some in the West gave credence to what was being said about the birth of a Soviet nation; others, more simply, started once again to identify the USSR with Russia. Of course there were exceptions. In 1960, Robert Conquest published a pioneering study on the deportation of nationalities. The Ukrainian diaspora continued to produce studies, such as the one by Yaroslav Bilinsky; also worth mentioning are the new edition of Armstrong's work on Ukrainian nationalism (1963), and, that same year, Arthur Adams's sophisticated study on the Bolshevik defeat in Ukraine

in 1919.¹⁰ In 1960, Alexandre Benningsen and Chantal Quelquejay published their *Les mouvements nationaux chez les musulmans de Russie*, followed in subsequent years by studies dedicated to the peculiarities of the developments in Central Asia.

Meanwhile, the Tajik scandal, which broke out during the 22nd Congress, made visible the rise of a local (if corrupt) bloc of power, further drawing attention to these developments. At the end of the decade, Seton-Watson underlined the importance of the “national question” in the history of the Russian empire, and particularly in the revolution of 1905, whereas Conquest edited the collection *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice*, and Roman Szporluk the collection of some of Pokrovsky’s works. Szporluk would also study the influence of Eastern European countries and the territories annexed in 1939 on the history of the USSR. The return of official anti-Semitism and the Soviet Jews’ wish to emigrate spurred interest for the Jewish question, to which Zvi Gitelman dedicated his *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics* in 1972.¹¹

Despite the emergence of a strong “national” component in the Dissent, in Ukraine as well as in the Baltic or among Crimean Tatars, in the wake of 1968 and of the renewed interest toward Marxism, Western historiography became increasingly disinterested in the “national question,” which it considered almost irrelevant, or even misleading, compared to the social one. In 1977, the otherwise interesting collection on Stalinism edited by Robert Tucker made no mention of it, and even competent historians like Ronald Suny placed class before nation

¹⁰ R. Conquest, *Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (London: Macmillan, 1960); Y. Bilinsky, *The Second Soviet Republic: The Ukraine After World War II* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1964); A.E. Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine: The Second Campaign, 1918–1919* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

¹¹ A. Benningsen and C. Lemercier-Quelquejay, *Les Mouvements nationaux chez les musulmans de Russie: le “sultangaliévisme” au Tartastan, 1917* (Paris: Mouton, 1960); H. Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire, 1801–1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); R. Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1967); Pokrovsky, *Russia in World History*, cit.; R. Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000); Z. Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Section of the CPSU, 1917–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

(though he gave the latter the role it deserved in his studies on Georgia and Armenia).¹² The custom—widespread even among the more discerning scholars—of using the designations "USSR" and "Russia," as well as "Soviet" and "Russian," as synonyms was thus strengthened, and was evident both in works and in works' titles. A sign of the spirit of the time, the Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN)—an international academic association, which today organizes congresses attended by thousands of scholars—was founded amid general disinterest by Stephen Horak, who had been active in the anti-Soviet resistance in western Ukraine, and Henry Huttenbach, who later founded the *Journal of Genocide Research*. Its early sessions, often hosted by other scientific associations, were attended by only a few dozen people, who usually belonged to this or that Soviet "minority," and most notably to the Ukrainian one, as in the case of Orest Subtelny (who later became the editor-in-chief of *Nationalities Papers*, the association's journal). At the time, thanks to contributions from diaspora communities, Ukrainians themselves were founding important research centers, including the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, born in 1973.

The polished and straightforward image the regime offered in the Brezhnev years seemed to confirm that the "national question," though it continued to exist in the USSR, was increasingly less important and headed toward resolution, as further suggested by the apparent stability of ethnic policies and relations. The Soviet leadership continued to use the rhetoric of the "Soviet people," which Brezhnev defined as a "new historical community" once more in 1971. He also clarified, however, that this did not mean national differences had vanished. Setting himself apart from Khrushchev, he presented the Soviet people not as the result of a fusion, but rather as a new and peculiar creature, made up of groups that maintained their specificities, and actually made them flourish. Yet his words belied his decision to promote, particularly in

¹² R.C. Tucker, ed., *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Norton, 1977); R.G. Suny, ed., *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change: Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); R.G. Suny, *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); L.H. Siegelbaum and R.G. Suny, eds., *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class, and Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

western Republics, a slow but certain process of Russification. After all, Brezhnev himself—who started to declare himself a Russian in the 1960s—was of Ukrainian descent, and was thus a product of this same process. This decision entailed the removal of those leaders who opposed it, like the First secretary of the Ukrainian Communist party Petro Shelest, and was embodied by the policies of the new federal Ministry of Education. The latter promoted the role of Russian in primary schools, implicitly admitting that the driving forces behind the shaping of a national community were language and culture, rather than ideological or class solidarity.¹³

This strengthened the provincialization of national cultures. At the same time, Brezhnev's preference for tranquility and his decision to respect cadres as much as possible, as well as the quota system in place within national republics, favored the consolidation of local power groups. Despite their provincialism, their submission to Moscow, and their conduct on the edge of the law, these groups may be regarded as nation-building embryos. Amid the general decay of Soviet culture, instead of the expected gradual replacement of national form by socialist content, localist (thus indirectly "national") behavior became more prominent, permeating an increasingly empty Soviet shell.

Meanwhile, the pact between the regime and a section of Russian nationalism advanced, although sectors of the elite still attached to Marxism, supported by reformist and Occidentalist intellectual circles, hindered these steps forward. Often allegorical in nature, owing to growing conservative opposition, the ensuing controversies dragged on in Soviet journals and magazines throughout the 1970s. Furthermore, Russian nationalism was internally divided. On the one hand, there were those who accepted, albeit tacitly, the pact with the regime. On the other hand, there were those who—after calling on Moscow to substitute national ideology for Marxism-Leninism, which they viewed as a lifeless residue—fought against the Soviet system and its past. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was the most illustrious exponent of the latter camp. As recounted by a retired Molotov in his interviews with

¹³ P. Shelest, *Ukraino nasha radyanska* (Kiev: Polityvydav, 1970); P. Shelest, *Spravzhnii sud istorii shche poperedu*, ed. Ju. Shapoval (Kiev: Heneza, 2003).

Felix Chuev, the country's main "national question," as well as the one farthest from being solved, was the Russian one.¹⁴ Despite attempts to obscure its findings, the 1979 census indicated a severe decline in the Slavic population, primarily due to alcoholism, and fostered concerns for the growth of Muslim populations. Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, author of studies on Central Asia, had anticipated these concerns in the West in her aptly titled book *L'Empire éclaté*, where she highlighted the contradictions inherent within the USSR's demographic development, which, however, did not have direct political consequences. That same year, Nekrich, who by then had emigrated to the West, redressed the fate of the peoples deported at the end of World War II, availing himself of research conducted in the USSR in the 1960s. And yet studies on the "national question" continued to be little developed. Also, the part played in these studies by specialists of Ukrainian origin, like Bohdan Krawchenko, and their students, like Jim Mace (who in 1983, under Szporluk's direction, produced the first important work on the Ukrainian national communism of the 1920s), continued to be prominent.¹⁵

The Turning Point

The role that the "national question" played in the USSR's dissolution urged scholars to take a different approach. Subsequent conflicts in former Yugoslavia, as well as in the Caucasus and in Central Asia, and the birth of dozens of states, frequently combining more or less nationalistic ideologies with the ones in place under socialism, strengthened this new stance. The latter was fostered also by the documents found in the archives, which substantiated the importance of the "national question"

¹⁴ A. Solzhenitsyn, *East and West* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), which includes his 1974 *Letter to Soviet Leaders*; F. Chuev, *140 besed s Molotovym* (Moscow: Terra, 1991); Zaslavsky, *Soviet-Jewish Emigration and Soviet Nationality Policy*; J. Millar, ed., *Politics, Work and Daily Life in the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹⁵ H. Carrère d'Encausse, *L'Empire éclaté: la revolte des nations en U.R.S.S.* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978); A.M. Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples* (New York: Norton, 1978); B. Krawchenko, *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine*; Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation*.

throughout Soviet history. And so the issue came to be perhaps the single most debated. Indeed, the new wave of historiography, as if in compensation for past neglect, attributed almost excessive importance to the matter, overlooking other aspects of the Soviet experience, including economic and ideological ones.

In any case, the new season yielded important results. In 1992, these were showcased in Andreas Kappeler's bright reconstruction of the weight and role of the "national question" during the tsarist empire, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*, where 1905 is portrayed more like a Russian 1848 than like the first act of socialist 1917. The book was followed, in 1994, by Yuri Slezkine's important studies on the small peoples of the North and on the unexpected results of the socialist construction; by Jörg Baberowski's study on Stalinism in the Caucasus; by Francine Hirsch and Juliette Cadiot's study on the role of ethnographers, statisticians, intellectuals, and censuses in the making of the USSR; and by Olivier Roy's study on Central Asia.¹⁶ Isabelle Ohayon and Niccolò Pianciola also provided noteworthy contributions to the understanding of the "national question." Meanwhile, a new generation of scholars of Islam and Central Asian peoples respectfully criticized Bennigsen's school for relying too much on the sources provided by the Soviet state (yet how could it have done otherwise?), which resulted in viewing the Islamic community from outside. But the most significant and innovative work on the matter was Terry Martin's *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*, which offered a convincing portrayal of the

¹⁶ A. Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (New York: Longman, 2001); Y. Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Y. Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, Or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 2 (1994): 414–52; J. Baberowski, *"Der Fein dist überall": Stalinismus im Kaukasus* (Munich: Anstalt, 2003); P. Blitstein, "Nation-Building or Russification?" in *A State of Nations*; F. Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); J. Cadiot, *Le laboratoire imperial: Russie-Urss, 1860-1940* (Paris: CNRS, 2007); O. Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

role of the "national question" in the formative stages of Soviet history, resetting the studies on the matter.¹⁷

The studies listed above fueled lively and sometimes heated debates, particularly with regard to the link between the "national question" and repression, crucial by its very nature to any moral verdict on Soviet history. For instance, the discovery of the ethnic dimension of the mass operations of 1937–38 and, more in general, the recognition of the importance of the ethnic criterion in Stalinist repression urged the *Slavic Review*, in 2002, to discuss whether it might be possible to talk about "racial policies" in the case of Stalinism. Some claimed that, in time, Stalinism adopted in national matters the "essentialist" positions of those who attribute eternal and unchangeable features to nations. Despite Stalin's undeniable preference for or aversion to this or that nationality, a similar thesis is unconvincing. For one thing, as early as 1913, the future tyrant had theorized that while nationalities were historical constructions, once "constructed" they became concrete historical objects that could be manipulated as such, which is what he did—without necessarily adopting essentialist positions as a result.¹⁸

In particular, the new studies on the anti-cosmopolitanism and anti-Semitism of the last phase of Stalinism, the most remarkable of which are the ones by Gennady Kostyrchenko, have drawn attention to the fate of the Soviet Jewish community, to which Zaslavsky and his family belonged, and raised the issue of whether Stalin was preparing its deportation in the months prior to his death. The Shoah and the repression of its memory, studied among others by Zvi Gitelman and Antonella Salomoni, aroused equal interest.¹⁹

¹⁷ I. Ohayon, *Sédentarisation des Kazakhs dan l'URSS de Staline* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2006); N. Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera* (Rome: Viella, 2009); A. Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

¹⁸ S.U. Alieva, ed., *Natsionalnye repressii v SSSR, 1919–1952 gody*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Insan, 1993); N.F. Bugai, *Deportation of Peoples in the Soviet Union* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 1996); P.M. Polian, *Against Their Will* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004); J.O. Pohl, *Ethnic Cleansing in the USSR* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999). See also E.D. Weitz's discussion in "Racial Politics Without the Concept of Race," *Slavic Review* 1 (2002): 1–65.

¹⁹ G. Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995); Z. Gitelman, ed., *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR* (Bloomington:

The unearthing of documents on the effects of deportation on the “punished peoples,” who lost as many as 20–25 percent of their members over a short span of time, prompted scholars like J. Otto Pohl to maintain that what took place was a genocide. However, the matter of genocide resurfaced primarily in connection with the famine in Kazakhstan and in Ukraine, ushering in a number of debates and controversies, which I addressed in 2004 in an article on the *Cahiers du monde russe*.²⁰

The Ukrainian question took center stage also owing to this region’s importance in Soviet history at large. As pointed out by T. Martin, Ukraine’s role in Soviet history was similar to Poland’s in tsarist history, not only because of its size (before 1935, the Ukrainian people accounted for almost 50 percent of the non-Russian population of the USSR), but also because of its frontier position, and the strength and traditions of its national movement. And yet Martin further noted that the main “national question” of the Soviet Union was in fact the Russian question. Among other things, he maintained that Russian rehabilitation was the most important change in Soviet national policy pre-1939, and criticized those scholars of the national question who excluded Russians from the scope of their investigation as a matter of principle.

Conversely, Russians’ unexpected but decisive role in the downfall of the USSR—to which, against all predictions, they preferred Boris Yeltsin’s Russia—had already contributed to changing scholars’ attitude toward them. As Ulam confessed candidly, scholars had deemed such an outcome impossible. They were certain that Russians considered the entire Soviet Union their homeland, and that the Russian Federal

Indiana University Press, 1997); A. Salomoni, *L’Unione Sovietica e la Shoah* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007).

²⁰ J.O. Pohl, “Stalin’s Genocide against the Repressed Peoples,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 2 (2000): 267–93; A. Graziosi, *The Soviet 1931–33 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor: Is a New Interpretation Possible, What Would Its Consequences Be?* [2004], now in *Hunger by Design: The Great Ukrainian Famine and Its Soviet Context*, ed. H. Hryn (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 2009): 1–19. See also N. Naimark, *Stalin’s Genocides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), and “Perspectives on Norman Naimark’s *Stalin’s Genocide*. Forum,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3 (2012): 149–89.

Republic was less important to them than the other Republics were to their respective nationalities. David Brandenberger, Yitzhak Brudny, and Nikolay Mitrokhin dedicated important studies to the Russian question—particularly to the birth and development of Russian-Soviet nationalism. The first highlighted the part played by Stalin and by the ideological shift of the 1930s, and later of the Second World War and of the post-war years, in creating the “modern Russian national identity,” whereas the other two scholars focused their attention on the subsequent period. Brudny underlined the role of intellectuals and “peasant writers” in the reinvention of Russia. Mitrokhin analyzed the reaction of Russian functionaries and leaders to the relinquishing, after 1953, of Russian nationalism as the hinge of official discourse, and to its transformation into an autonomous ideology and social movement.²¹

The importance assigned to the “national question” rekindled the debate on whether a Soviet people existed, and on the reality and limits of assimilationism. The emergence of new national states, for instance, led some scholars, including Ronald Suny and Olivier Roy, to reverse the traditional paradigm of the USSR as a nation killer, to reference the title of one of Conquest’s books. In their view, thanks to the indigenization policies adopted in 1922–23, the USSR was rather an incubator of national states. This hypothesis, not without basis, nonetheless underestimated the repressive element of the regime, which slowed and distorted the development of national structures and cultures. As George Liber observed, in the course of Soviet history, they were first drained of their vital energy and then filled with elements that ended up drawing inspiration from nationalism, because of the crisis of official ideology, but offered a distorted and provincial version of it. Republican elites too, while they readily availed themselves of nationalism, had, according to Gorbachev, a limited national conscience.²²

²¹ A. Ulam, *Understanding the Cold War: A Historian's Personal Reflections* (Charlottesville, VA: Leopoli Press, 2000); D. Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); N. Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia: dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR, 1953–1985* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003).

²² R.G. Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); O. Roy, *The New Central Asia*; R. Conquest, *The Nation Killers: Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (London: Macmillan, [1960] 1970); G.O. Liber,

Terry Martin and Mark Kramer reminded fellow scholars that the ultimate failure of the Soviet system should not obscure its success in generating homogenization, attested to, among other things, by the results of the *Harvard Interview Project*.²³ Of course, the latter took place right after the war and victory gave new content to the notion of a “Soviet people.” But, in general, the strategy of separating high culture, which was Soviet and hence Russian, from national, localist, and folkloric culture did not fail to yield results. In fact, according to Kramer, assimilation took more steps forward than is generally assumed, particularly among non-Russians who lived outside their Republics and in cities. Census data on the percentage of non-Russians identifying as Russian, the expansion of those who declared Russian as their mother tongue, the increase in the number of mixed marriages with children claiming to be Russian, and so on, all confirmed Kramer’s point of view. Thus, if Soviet nationality policies were indeed contradictory in nature, their end result was nonetheless rather unfavorable to the growth of national identities. The federal form, instead of promoting the creation of national identities, determined fractures within the elites that emerged at the time of the collapse of the USSR. This collapse was triggered by reforms made inevitable by preceding degradation and not by national conflicts.

Therefore, the new states were defined as national following Lenin’s decision of 1922 and the failure of official ideology, rather than by conscious decision or maturation. The disappointment nationalists suffered in many of the new states on recognizing elements of continuity between the post-Soviet and pre-Soviet eras confirms this hypothesis. Somewhat obscured at first because of the repudiation of the pre-1991 experience, these elements lingered on, reminding them that their states had been born in 1917 or 1922, not 1991. The paradox remains of how the regime—which in time aimed to substitute socialist content for national form—succeeded in creating “nations,” particularly in

Soviet Nationality Policy, Urban Growth, and Identity Change in the Ukrainian USSR, 1923–1934 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

²³ Harvard Emigre Interview Project, http://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/research_portal/emigre.html.

regions like Central Asia. This success may be explained, at least in part, by the fact that in national matters, as we have seen, Bolsheviks did not follow ill-advised Marxist theories, but a version of the theory according to which language and culture were the main criteria for nationality, rendered more sophisticated also by the inclusion of Marxist (hence, socio-economic) elements.

This takes us to the issue underpinning a large part of these debates: was the USSR an empire, and, if so, in what sense? This is a difficult question, and the answer cannot be univocal. Within the boundaries in place in 1939, the USSR was also—and in certain periods prevailing, though never exclusively—an empire. Yet its very rise as a federation proves that, as also attested by the failure of the Nazi imperial attempt, the creation of empires had become impossible in twentieth-century Europe. And, as pointed out by the participants in *The Multiethnic Soviet Union in Comparative Perspective* forum,²⁴ unlike what happened in the case of colonial empires and the Tsarist empire, the USSR never treated “natives,” for instance those of Central Asia, differently from other citizens before the law. Nevertheless, in the territories annexed after 1939, as well as in some of the Eastern European countries, the Soviet presence was undeniably imperial. Even in these areas, however, the spirit of the time compelled Moscow to respect national forms, and this carried great weight both during Soviet rule and at the time of its end. Furthermore, at least within its boundaries, the Soviet state endured through its final decades by dealing primarily Russian resources out to the other Republics, which were however also impoverished by the socialist system imposed on them. This produced at least the impression that the periphery was living off the imperial center. Finally, as noted by the former US ambassador Jack Matlock, while the USSR long presented itself as an “evil empire,” ruled by an evil tyrant, it was never the empire of a cruel race committed to affirming its supremacy over other peoples.²⁵

²⁴ “The Multiethnic Soviet Union in Comparative Perspective,” *Slavic Review* 2 (2006): 231–303.

²⁵ J. Matlock, *Autopsy of an Empire: The American Ambassador's Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1995).

The Katyn Case

History and Articulation of Official Discourse in Russia

INESSA YAZHBOROVSKAIA

The Katyn case¹ has haunted the post–World War II bilateral relations between Russia and Poland, affecting the two countries in different ways. This chapter does not describe the events of Katyn historically, but rather analyze the Katyn discourse or, more precisely, how the issue has been described, internalized, and dealt with in Russia since World War II to the present. I take into account both the macrostructure and broader context—that is, the general discourse on Katyn—as well as a number of sublevels (namely, stratifications and specific discourses through which the issue has been articulated in the course of the years).

The Birth of the Official Soviet Version

During World War II, the nascent Katyn discourse in the Soviet Union enveloped a limited number of people: those who ordered the crime, and those who carried it out. It would surface periodically in the myth-making of the higher circles of the Stalinist regime and then disappear for decades at a time.

The period between the discovery of the mass graves of Katyn in the spring of 1943, when reports of the victims first surfaced, to the brief mention of Katyn at the Nuremberg Trials, to its reappearance in the 1950s (the U.S. Congressional Committee investigation led by Ray J.

¹ In historiography, this is the name commonly used for the mass shooting of 21,857 Polish nationals that took place in the spring of 1940 in the NKVD camps of Kozelsk, Starobelsk, and Ostashkov, and in western Ukrainian and Belarusian prisons (the incident takes its name from the site where the first victims of the Kozelsk camp were found, the Katyn Forest, on the banks of the Dnieper River).

Madden) corresponded to the build-up of the “official” Soviet version, which—ascribes the blame to the Nazis. This myth lay at the heart both of the official fund drive among the population to collect money for the tank “In memory of the victims of Katyn” and of the efforts to advertise the fate of the Belarussian village of Khatyn, razed to the ground by the Germans.²

At first, this early discourse on Katyn found no place in Soviet-Polish relations, as if the issue had vanished without a trace when diplomatic relations between the countries were severed in 1943. Later, Soviet propaganda circulated information on the Burdenko Commission report,³ which was based on the forged results of the partial exhumation of the victims’ bodies carried out by the Soviets. This official version was reiterated in 1953 in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* and imposed as the definitive truth, imposing an absolute ban on doubts or alternative interpretations. Thus, the official political discourse on Katyn was originally formulated in a narrow and ideologically biased context. This formulation, however, was short-lived.

Soon thereafter, the Katyn theme was completely erased, struck from Soviet encyclopedias and historical dictionaries. The ban on discussing the Katyn case extended to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and to security organs. As late as the early years of the perestroika, the KGB general Georgy Zhukov⁴ noted in a confidential conversation with a high-ranking party functionary that “both in the NKVD and in the KGB, it was strictly forbidden to speak of Katyn in any way, even as a German crime.”

² In an attempt to corroborate the official version on Katyn, Soviet propaganda emphasized the fate suffered by the village of Khatyn, which in fact was razed to the ground by the Nazis, in hopes that the similarity between the two names would cement the notion that the Germans were responsible for the massacre.

³ “Soobshchenie Spetsialnoi komissii po rassledovaniuu obstoiatelstv rasstrela nemet-sko-fashistskimi zakhvatchikami v Katynskom lesu voennoplennykh polskikh ofitserov” [Report of the special commission for ascertaining and investigating the circumstances of the shooting of Polish officer prisoners by the German-fascist invaders in the Katyn Forest], *Pravda*, January 26, 1944.

⁴ Georgy Zhukov, not to be confused with his famous namesake, the Marshal who commanded the various Soviet fronts during the war, was responsible for creation of foreign military formations on the territory of the USSR and served as Stalin’s personal envoy in Polish matters.

To this he added the following words: “No documents exist on the Katyn case, and seeking any would be pointless.”⁵

It was only after the Communist Party’s 20th Congress, in 1956, that news on increasing tensions in Poland concerning past historical conflicts began circulating among Soviet authorities. These inevitably included the Katyn massacre.⁶ These issues were surfacing at mass gatherings and assemblies in Poland, as well as in leaflets and other publications. The Soviet embassy in Warsaw informed Moscow of the situation with alarm, but there was little public resonance and the matter did not penetrate the Soviet historical conscience. Furthermore, in the spring of 1959, at the end of the thaw, Nikita Khrushchev decided to eliminate the Katyn materials from the NKVD archives, keeping only a limited number of essential documents, sealed in “special folders” of “Envelope no. 1,” to be opened only by the supreme leader of the party-state.

Perestroika and the Beginning of the Historical-Scientific Discourse

A scientific approach to the Katyn case, dispensing with the Stalinist myths, became possible only during the perestroika period, when opportunities arose for a critical and unbiased reexamination of the most difficult phases of the bilateral relations between Russia and Poland.

The modern debate on Katyn started taking shape in Russia toward the end of the 1980s. On April 21, 1987, during the forty-second anniversary of the wartime Pact of Friendship, Collaboration and Mutual Aid between the USSR and Poland, presidents Mikhail Gorbachev and Wojciech Jaruzelski signed the Declaration on Soviet-Polish Cooperation in the Fields of Ideology, Science and Culture, with which both sides pledged to remedy the blind-spots in the relations between the two states. But from the beginning, the two sides adopted different

⁵ I.S. Yazhborovskaia, A.Iu. Yablokov, and V.S. Parsadanova, *Katynskii sindrom v sovetsko-polskikh i rossiisko-polskikh otnosheniakh* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009), 208. Cited in P. Kostikow and B. Rolinski, *Wiziane z Kremla: Moskwa-Warszawa* (Warsaw: BGW, 1992), 196f.

⁶ *Zbrodnia Katyńska. Bibliografia 1940–2010* (Warsaw: Centralna Biblioteka Wojskowa im. Marszałka Józefa Piłsudskiego, Niezależny Komitet Historyczny Badania Zbrodni Katyńskiej. Polska Fundacja Katyńska, 2010).

approaches to the Katyn case. Resorting to a method typical of authoritarian societies, the Soviets proposed to solve thornier matters by appealing to the rhetoric of “friendship and collaboration,” whereas the Poles requested that the document include the following sentence: “We will not saddle our children and grandchildren with unresolved issues.”⁷

A decisive role in this phase was played by the Joint Commission on the history of the relations between the two countries—established concomitantly with the drafting of the Declaration and made up of scholars hailing from both the USSR and the People’s Republic of Poland. The research team was entrusted with the task of shedding light on the blind spots of Soviet-Polish history and constructing historically valid scientific descriptions. The Katyn case immediately came to the fore, but it quickly became apparent that the Soviet side was unequal to either approaching or discussing the matter. By denying the existence of any documentation, the Soviets rejected the very possibility of dealing with the historical event. After difficult negotiations, the Joint Commission was given access to two documents: the classified “Communication” of the Burdenko Commission and the subsequent security organs’ report that putatively confirmed the Burdenko Commission’s conclusions based on a second examination of the mass graves following the liberation of the Smolensk area. According to the Soviets, there was nothing else. The Soviets’ lack of cooperation on this issue provoked the lively protest of the eminent Polish historian Czesław Madajczyk, a leading Polish expert on Katyn, who withdrew from the Joint Commission with the support of all the Polish members.

As a result, the Katyn case proved to be not just a historical blind spot, but the most painful and mythologized blot on Soviet-Polish relations. The Polish members of the Joint Commission insisted on the key importance of the inquiry, both for Polish public opinion and for ensuing relations between the two countries. Conversely, the leadership of the Soviet party-state, which kept a vigilant eye on the Commission’s deliberations, opposed all attempts to pursue the investigation by

⁷ *Deklaratsiia o sovetsko-polskom sotrudnichestve v oblasti ideologii, nauki i kultury* [Declaration on Soviet-Polish Cooperation in the Fields of Ideology, Science and Culture] (Moscow: Politizdat, 1987), 10.

limiting the Commission's scope and powers. "They kept urging me to bring up the issue of the maltreatment of Soviet prisoners of war in 1921," recalled Georgy Smirnov, the Soviet co-president of the Joint Commission.⁸ Smirnov, however, decided not to exploit the historical memory of the 1919–20 Soviet-Polish war to "equalize" the number of victims and "counterbalance" Poland's demands.

Faced the Katyn case for the first time and opting for an unbiased inquiry, Smirnov made the risky decision to create—under his own guidance—a restricted subcommittee made up of three Soviet researchers: Valentina Parsadanova, Evgeniya Skripileva, and Inessa Yazhborovskaya. Wielding his authority as recent advisor of Gorbachev's, he summoned the archive directors and requested urgent access to the materials concerning Katyn. The subcommittee began working on retrieving relevant documents from the archives, and took the first step toward formulating a true historical-scientific discourse on Katyn. After Parsadanova, other historians like Yuri Zoria and Natalia Lebedeva took advantage of archival access.

On the initiative of the committee's Russian section, the historical discourse was broadened to include large segments of the international scientific community, through the All-Union Conference of Polish historians, organized in January 1989 and titled "Current issues in Polish studies, Russian-Polish and Soviet-Polish relations." In the session devoted to the blind spots in the bilateral relations between the two countries, which she chaired, Inessa Yazhborovskaia revealed for the first time the evidence showing that the Katyn massacre had been carried out by Soviet repressive organs. This news understandably unsettled many of the participants. The dean of Lviv University's history department proposed that Yazhborovskaya be removed from her position as the session chair, and that the discussion return to the official discourse. The representative of the Institute for Slavic Studies (Moscow), in turn, suggested that the matter could not be raised without the consent of the Polish colleagues. As a result, the discussion never took place.

⁸ G.L. Smirnov, *Uroki minuvshogo* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1997), 222.

Maturation of Political Discourse on Katyn

The logjam in the evolution of the Katyn discourse was broken at the very top: following Wojciech Jaruzelski's repeated appeals to Mikhail Gorbachev, the leading figures of the Soviet party-state began reappraising the Katyn case. Constantly informed both of the work carried out by the Joint Commission and of the debates in Poland, Valentin Falin,—the head of the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee, who had been gradually compiling his own dossier of Katyn materials,—finally prepared and presented a memorandum to the Central Committee of the CPSU on March 6, 1989. According to this document, which of course was originally classified, the issue had become particularly resonant because the vast majority of Poles were convinced that the shooting of the prisoners of war in the three NKVD camps were “the responsibility of Joseph Stalin and Lavrentiy Beria, and that the massacre had taken place in the spring of 1940.” Falin further emphasized that the Polish group of the Joint Commission had evidence that refuted the conclusions presented in the Burdenko Communication, threatening severe repercussions for Poland's foreign policy orientation towards the Soviet Union, which was to be avoided at all costs.⁹

On March 22, high-ranking Central Committee members Eduard Shevardnadze, Valentin Falin, and Vladimir Kryuchkov presented yet another “secret” memorandum to Central Committee. According to this document, the heightened interest in the Katyn case in Poland sprang from the official position of Polish authorities that the Soviets were responsible for the death of the Polish prisoners of war in the spring of 1940. In an attempt to mollify Gorbachev, the memorandum's authors stressed that official Polish publications blamed “Stalin's NKVD,” rather than the Soviet state. The lack of a clear resolution, they further observed, was “the greatest stumbling block not for the Soviet-Polish relations of the past, but of the present.” Until the tragedy

⁹ *Katyń. Dokumenty ludobójstwa: Dokumenty i materiały archiwalne przekazane Polsce 14 października 1992 r.* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk: 1992), 108, 110, and 112.

is “thoroughly explained, normal relations between Poland and the Soviet Union will not be possible,” concluded the three authors.¹⁰ Ten years later, the contents of this discourse found the following, lapidary formulation in Falin’s memoirs: “For a Pole, politics and relations with the Soviet Union always turn to Katyn.”¹¹

Less than a year later, on February 22, 1990, Falin personally sent Gorbachev an important additional memorandum titled “Supplementary information on the Katyn tragedy.” The document summarized the results of archival research and confirmed the existence of an NKVD resolution numbered 00117, a 1939 document that revealed that the prisoners of the three special camps “were not to be freed and repatriated,” but rather forwarded to the custody of the NKVD regional directorates and, in the course of this “operation,” “were lost” so as not to “figure in subsequent statistical reports.” Files on the prisoners detained in the Starobelsk camp were destroyed, and those of the prisoners held in the other two camps were transferred to the Chief Directorate for Prisoners of War.¹² Falin noted that Aleksandr Shelepin (the head of the KGB at the time) had written about the existence of all these files back in 1959.¹³

On April 13, 1990, Gorbachev officially presented Jaruzelski with the prisoner lists from the three NKVD camps and with other materials, which was accompanied by a TASS statement ascribing responsibility for the events of Katyn to NKVD leaders (Beria and his adjutants). The official discourse on Katyn thus shifted to the official acknowledgement of the NKVD’s responsibility for the massacre. This paved the way for the first publications by Parsadanova, Zoria, and Lebedeva.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid., 102, 104, and 106.

¹¹ V.M. Falin, *Bez skidok na obstoiatelstva: politicheskie vospominaniia* (Moscow: Respublika, 1999), 406.

¹² *Katyń. Dokumenty ludobójstwa*, 118, and 120.

¹³ R.G. Pikhoia and A. Geishtor, ed., *Katyn. Plenniki neobiavlennoi voiny: dokumenty* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond “Demokratiia,” 1997), 601.

¹⁴ V. Parsadanova and Iu. Zoria, “Katyn,” *Novoe vremia* 1990 (16); V. Parsadanova, “K istorii katynskogo dela,” *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1990 (3); Iu.N. Zoria and A.S. Prokopenko, “Niurnbergskii bumerang,” *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal* 7 1990; Iu.N. Zoria, “Rezhisser katynskoi tragedii,” *Beria: konets karery* [Beria: the End of a Career] (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991); N.S. Lebedeva, “Katynskaia tragediia,” *Moskovskie Novosti* 12 (1990); N.S. Lebe-

The military historian Mikhail Semiryaga then published two other important declassified documents pertaining to the Katyn case.¹⁵ The historical-scientific discourse was beginning to broaden.

The Birth of the Katyn Syndrome and the anti-Katyn Front

In the meantime, a different strategy emerged among the top echelons of the Soviet Communist Party. It began with Gorbachev's first encounter with the contents of "Envelope no. 1" stored in the archive of the sixth sector of the Special Department of the CPSU's Central Committee (and subsequently in the Presidential Archive). The materials sealed within the special folder explicitly described the nature and scale of the massacre and addressed the responsibility for the criminal decision, triggering what we might call a "Katyn syndrome," that is, a pathological reaction to the issue. According to the testimony of Vladimir Aleksandrov, an International Department consultant, the newly available information frightened Gorbachev, dissuading him from the huge political responsibility attendant to making public such delicate information. Furthermore, the Special Department archive also held a special folder with materials from the Burdenko Commission. After consulting a summary of the Burdenko Commission's conclusions, prepared by the Institute for General History of the Academy of Sciences (signed by Lebedeva), Gorbachev opted to postpone a full airing of the Katyn case.¹⁶

Thus, after promising the Poles he would disclose the whole truth on the massacre, Gorbachev decided to defer the politically fraught admission to "give the scholars all the time they need for their inquiries." In the meantime, he proposed that the international scientific community be invited to gather as much information as possible in

deva, "I eshche raz o Katyni," *Moskovskiy Novosti* 18 (1990); N.S. Lebedeva, "O tragedii v Katyni," *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn* 5 (1990).

¹⁵ "Sekretnye dokumenty iz osobykh papok: podgotovka publikatsii i vstupilnaia statia Semirjagi M.I.," *Voprosy istorii* (1) 1993.

¹⁶ Yazhborovskaia, Yablokov, and Parsadanova, *Katynskii sindrom*, 308–9.

order to “establish the truth.” As might have been expected, this new approach met the firm opposition of the Polish members of the Joint Commission, who believed the truth had already been established. Still, just as the true nature of the Katyn affair was coming into focus, Moscow arrived at a new “anti-Katyn” strategy to muddy the waters and deflect the painful responsibility of the Soviet side by finding a counterbalancing issue. The first step in this direction was contained in a directive by President Gorbachev, dated November 3, 1990, covering the new “inter-state treaty” between the Soviet Union and Poland. In a long list of instructions to Soviet ministries and regulatory bodies, provision number 8 called on the public prosecutor of the USSR to speed up the investigation and present conclusions on the Katyn case. The next provision identified institutions, bodies, and organizations entrusted with locating “archival materials concerning facts and events in the history of bilateral Soviet-Polish relations in which the Soviet side suffered harm.”¹⁷ The fate of the Soviet prisoners of war in 1919–20 was raised and exploited as a legal-political “counterbalance” to the Katyn massacre.

Despite these measures and Gorbachev’s passive resistance, Valentin Falin believed it was essential to divulge the truth about the Katyn massacre, after coming to a preliminary agreement with the Polish leadership about the timing and form of the announcement.¹⁸ Still, the earliest news on the true nature of Katyn, leaked from Polish sources, were published by Soviet journalists like Vladimir Abarinov (in *Literaturnaia gazeta*), Gennadiy Zhavoronkov (in *Moskovskie novosti*), Lev Elin (in *Novoe vremia*), Nikolay Ermolovich (in *Izvestia*), and others. The first publication in book form, later translated and revised several times, was a piece of investigative journalism, *The Labyrinth of Katyn*, written with honesty and courage by Abarinov.¹⁹

¹⁷ Gorbachev’s instructions of 3 November 1990; see “Sekretnye dokumenty iz osobykh papok” [The secret documents of the special folders], in *Voprosy istorii*, 1993 (1).

¹⁸ *Katyn. Dokumenty ludobójstwa*, 118, 120, and 122.

¹⁹ V. Abarinov, *Katynskii labirint* (Moscow: Novosti, 1991); see also the English translation, *The Murderers of Katyn: A Russian Journalist Investigates the 1940 Massacre of 15,000 Polish Officers in Soviet Captivity* (New York: Hippocrene Press, 1993), and the new, updated edition: V. Abarinov, *Oprawcy z Katynia* (Kraków: Znak, 2007, 2010).

Investigation Shifts to the Legal Arena

The Joint Commission of Soviet and Polish scholars, convened to examine the history of bilateral relations between the two countries, concluded its work on the eve of the collapse of the USSR, just as the People's Republic of Poland had ceased to exist. In December 1991, among other important secret documents, Gorbachev handed "Envelope no. 1" over to Yeltsin, the newly elected president of the Russian Federation. By so doing Gorbachev effectively transferred responsibility for the case over to his successor, whom he advised not to underestimate the matter's gravity. According to Alexander Yakovlev, who witnessed the scene, Gorbachev said: "I am afraid that international complications may arise. But it's for you to decide." Boris Yeltsin read the contents of the envelope, and agreed that the issue warranted serious consideration.²⁰

Six months later, however, as the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation sat in judgment of the Soviet past, the Katyn case received a purely political push. The Katyn massacre came up in connection with the "CPSU case," viewed from a political rather than historical vantage point. Rather than the Katyn events themselves, the legal scrutiny focused on the fact that party leaders (including Gorbachev) had attempted to conceal them. This, in turn, led to the examination of documents contained in the highly classified "special folders."

As bilateral relations between Russia and Poland were reestablished, the process of declassification of secret documents proceeded in stops and starts. Following directives by the respective presidents, on April 27 and June 11 of 1992, an agreement between the archives of the countries was struck to publish a volume *Katyn: Documents of a Crime*. As is customary in such cases, the same documents were to be published in the two languages according to identical editorial criteria. The breadth of the documents and the full concordance of the Russian and Polish volumes were discussed in advance. In reality, the Russian side did not abide by the terms of the agreement. They did not comply with

²⁰ A.N. Yakovlev, "K chitateliu" [To the reader], in *Katyn. Plenniki neobieavlennoi voyny*, eds. Pikhov and Geishtor, 441.

the decisions made on the unified title, composition, or numbering of the volumes. As a result, a two-volume abridged edition appeared in Russian, instead of the full four-volume Polish edition.²¹

The Russian publication of the Katyn documents ran into obstacles from the outset. The archivists did not get the necessary funding; the internal referee insisted that the admission of responsibility by the TASS agency was sufficient and demanded that the volume include the documents on the Soviet-Polish war of 1920–21 to “counterbalance the Katyn materials.” Early on, during the preparation of the first volume, the deputy minister of culture Vyacheslav Bragin, together with Prof. Yazhborovskaya, called upon to provide an opinion, had to defend the publication by sending written appeals to “competent bodies.”

At the same time, one of the editors of the Katyn documents, Natalia Lebedeva, began compiling a book based on the newly-available documents, eventually published under the title *Katyn: A Crime Against Humanity*.²²

As the climate of bilateral Russian-Polish relations evolved, the Katyn case again came to the fore. On October 14, 1992, some of the documents contained in “Envelope no. 1”—particularly those disclosing the personal responsibility of Stalin and the group of Politburo members closest to him for the execution of the Polish prisoners of war detained in the three NKVD camps—were transmitted to President Lech Wałęsa, following President Yeltsin’s orders. In Poland, these documents were widely discussed and published in twice in book form.

On October 17, 1992, in an interview with Polish television, Yeltsin defined Russia’s stance on Katyn case: “Russia cannot accept responsibility for the crime committed at Katyn. The blame for that lies with the party, and with totalitarianism.” The two presidents agreed that Poland would not ask Russia for any material compensation.²³

²¹ See Pikhoia and Geishtor, ed., *Katyn. Plenniki neobieiavlennoi voyny. Dokumenty*; N.S. Lebedeva, ed., *Katyn. Mart 1940 g. - sentiabr 2000 g. Rasstrel. Sudby zhivyykh. Echo Katyni. Dokumenty* [Katyn. March 1940–September 2000. Shooting. The fate of the living. The echo of Katyn. Documents] (Moscow: “Ves mir,” 2001).

²² N.S. Lebedeva, *Katyn: prestuplenie protiv chelovechestva* (Moscow: Progress-Kultura, 1994); Polish trans. *Katyni: zbrodnia przeciwko ludzkości* (Warsaw: Bellona, 1998).

²³ N.I. Bukharin, *Rossiisko-polskie otnosheniia: 90-e gody XX veka–nachalo XXI veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 2007), III.

Meanwhile, local authorities began investigating the sites of mass graves of Polish prisoners in NKVD camps, notifying Moscow of the results. In Kharkov an investigation began as early as March 1990, during a local campaign to bury the discovered remains of war victims. The main agency of legal inquiry on the crimes was now the chief military prosecutor's office (known by its Russian acronym GVP), which opened case no. 159 on the shooting of Polish prisoners of war. The exhumation of mass graves and the conclusions drawn by the GVP expert committee on August 2, 1993 gave new impetus to the legal discourse.²⁴ The document acknowledged the primacy of international law and examined the legitimacy of detaining Polish nationals as prisoners of war starting from the second half of September 1939 on, of holding them as prisoners, and of subsequently liquidating them. It also challenged the "official Soviet version" based on the falsifications of the Burdenko Commission, and concluded that the blame for the crime rested with the top figures of the party, as well as with the NKVD organs.

The Russian-Polish bilateral communiqué, during President Yeltsin's official visit to Poland in August of 1993, contained the following statement: "In a climate of mutual understanding and good will, the circumstances of the crime of Katyn have been cleared up, and the guilty party shall be punished."²⁵ This was a major milestone in grounding the analysis on solid historical facts and their adequate interpretation in terms of Party politics and international relations, as well as in overcoming the Katyn syndrome. The intent of obtaining justice for "the victims of Stalin's repressions and crimes" was also expressed.²⁶ Yeltsin refused to officially apologize in Russia's name, but as he was placing the funeral wreath on the monument to the victims of Katyn in Warsaw, he did express his guilt by saying: "Forgive us, if you can."

However, as bilateral relations subsequently cooled, Yeltsin lost interest in bringing closure to the Katyn case. In the summer of 1994,

²⁴ See I. Yazhborovskaia, A. Jabłokow, and Iu. Zoria, *Katyń: zbrodnia chroniona tajemnicą państwową* (Warsaw: KiWi, 1998), 358–422; I.S. Yazhborovskaia, A.Iu. Yablokov and V.S. Parsadanova, *Katynskii sindrom*, 446–94.

²⁵ "Sovmestnaia rossiisko-polskaia deklaratsiia," Varshava, 25 avgusta 1993 g., *Diplomaticheskij vestnik*, September 17–18, 1993, 14.

²⁶ Ibid.

the investigation came to a halt. Imperfections in the Russian legislative and legal systems, as well as contempt for the law (what the President Dmitry Medvedev has termed an “affliction” affecting the Russian legal system),²⁷ came into full view in the final stages of the investigation, and particularly on June 13, 1994, when the court announced its decision to close the inquiry on the criminal case no. 159. The prosecution’s charges—which detailed not only the circumstances, but also the motives for the crime, and confirmed it was a genocide, as already unanimously acknowledged at the Nuremberg Trial (though at the time the Soviet delegation blamed the massacre on the Nazis)—were denied because the necessary mechanisms for implementing the primacy of international law in the new constitution of the Russian Federation were lacking. Instead, the crimes committed by NKVD prosecutors and other officials were to be treated merely as abuses of official power. After the collapse of the USSR, further investigations were also hindered by the difficulties of working in the newly independent states of Belarus and Ukraine, although an agreement among the three countries had been signed specifically to avoid such difficulties.²⁸

In the second half of the 1990s and in the 2000s, the “Katyn syndrome” once again started complicating Russian-Polish relations from a political and legal point of view. The “unfinished business” between the two countries once again moved center stage during the official visit of the new president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, to Poland in 2001, as well as in subsequent years. Putin promised to make all the documents on the Katyn case assembled by the GVP available to Poland. Yet the chief military prosecutor of the Russian Federation, Aleksandr Savenkov, provided the Poles with 67 volumes of Katyn materials, out of the 183 in hand, claiming that the others contained information classified as a state secret.

²⁷ D. Medvedev, *Rossii bolna prenebrezheniem k pravu*, December 29, 2010, www.echo.msk.ru/blog/echomsk/738010-echo/.

²⁸ The changing fortunes of the investigation on the Katyn case, and of the conflicts the latter caused, are detailed in the monograph written by the man in charge of the inquiry at the Main Military Prosecutor’s office, Anatoly Yablokov, and by the experts of his prosecution team, I.S. Yazhborovskaia, A.Iu. Yablokov, and V.S. Parsadanova, *Katynskii sindrom*.

Investigations were suspended for a few years, and the legal treatment of the case was subjected to a sort of moratorium, which lasted until September 21, 2004, when a final verdict of case No. 159 was reached. The case against the NKVD operatives found guilty of abuse of official powers was dismissed because the accused were already dead. Additionally, the verdict dismissing the case was itself classified. On March 11, 2005, Savenkov declared that the GVP did not find evidence of genocide against Polish citizens.²⁹

“Anti-Katyn” Falsifications

As a final political resolution of the Katyn case is still lacking, the Russian historical conscience has been at the mercy of an ever-multiplying series of ideological falsifications. Advocates of the Stalinist viewpoint on the Katyn massacre continued their activities in building a destructive pseudo- or anti-scientific discourse, thereby fueling the “Katyn syndrome.”³⁰

Gross forgeries and resuscitations of long-discredited Stalinist myths appeared in Yurii Mukhin’s numerous publications. Other authors—like Stanislav Kunyaev, Vladislav Shved, and Sergey Strygin—showed greater sophistication through pretend objectivity. They did not immediately appear to reject the official positions adopted in Russia in the 1990s, but skillfully led the reader to wrong conclusions by sowing seeds of doubt about the credibility of the evidence gathered in the course of the chief military prosecutor’s investigation. Nominally aiming to “solve the Katyn mystery,” these authors rehashed the long-refuted arguments originally advanced by the Burdenko

²⁹ RIA, *Novosti*, March 11, 2005.

³⁰ Yu. Mukhin, *Katynskii detektiv* [(Moscow: Svetoton, 1995); *Antirossiiskaia podlost. Nauchno-istoricheskii analiz* (Moscow: Forum, 2003); S. Kunyaev, *Shliachta i my* (Moscow: Nash Sovremennik, 2005); S. Kunayev, *Russkii polonez* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2006); V. Shved and S. Strygin, *Tainy Katyni* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2007); A.B. Martirosyan, *Na puti k mirovoi voine* (Moscow: “Veche,” 2008); D. Zhukov, *Polsha—“tsepnai pes” Zapada* (Moscow: “Jauza-Press,” 2009); R.I. Kosolapov et al., eds., *Nemtsy v Katyni. Dokumenty o rasstrele polskikh voennoplennykh v Katyni oseniu 1941 goda* (Moscow: ITRK, 2010).

Commission to blame the Nazis (execution with a shot to the back of the head, the use of German pistols, and so forth). At the same time, the same authors attempted to discredit as fake authentic documents, reports by jurists and scientists, depositions by witnesses, and even the materials resulting from the exhumations. To this day, these authors (and others in their camp) call for the case to be reopened, implying that new documents in their possession would absolve the Soviet repressive organs of their responsibility for the Katyn crime. By pretending to be taking part in a scientific controversy, these authors endeavor to rehabilitate the repressive Stalinist regime in the eyes of Russian public opinion and undermine the primacy of legal arguments.

In response to these authors, a series of polemical publications by Russian historians has appeared in recent years,³¹ dealing—among other issues—with the anti-Katyn tactic of focusing on the fate of the Red Army prisoners of war during the war of 1920. The number of these Red Army prisoners has been inflated, year after year, reaching 60,000–80,000, and even 120,000, even though according to the most recent and thorough bilateral publication of the original documents the number of victims did not exceed 20,000.³² Still, the authors of the new history textbook used in schools speak of “tens of thousands” of victims, and justify the Katyn massacre as putative “retribution” (or Stalin’s revenge) for the death of Red Army soldiers due to disease, cold, maltreatment, and even mass executions, unsupported by any evidence.³³

³¹ For a detailed analysis of this tendency in Russian historiography, see, among others, V. Oskotskii, *Polemika: stalinism, ksenofobiia, i antisemitizm v sovremennoi russkoi literature* (Moscow: Akademiia, 2005); “Zbrodnia Katyńska w oczach współczesnych Rosjan,” *Zeszyty Katyńskie* 22 (2007); “Zbrodnia Katyńska między prawdą i kłamstwem,” *Zeszyty Katyńskie* 23 (2008); I. Yazhborovskaia, “Russian Historical Writing About the Crime of Katyn,” translated by A. M. Cienciala, *The Polish Review* LIII (2008).

³² *Krasnoarmeicy v polskom plenu v 1919–1922 gg., sb. dokumentov i materialov* (Moscow, “Letnii sad,” 2004), II, 14, 24–26, and 28.

³³ A.A. Danilov and A.V. Filippov, “Zhdai ostalos nedolgo, poterpiti,” *Vremia novosti*, September 9, 2008. The reader can find a discussion on these issues in the contributions by Daria Lipińska-Nałęcz and Tomasz Nałęcz, and by Gennadij Matveev and Inessa Yazhborovskaia, in the Russian-Polish collection A.V. Torkunov and A.D. Rotfeld,

Conversely, four legal actions—based on conjectures by “anti-Katyn” exponents—have recently been brought before Russian courts of law, all of them aiming to defend Stalin’s honor, dignity, and “good name” in reference to the Katyn case. Stalin’s grandson, Yevgeny Dzhugashvili, was a claimant in these actions, suing for substantial monetary compensation from *Novaia gazeta* and the author Anatoly Yablokov who published incriminatory materials in that newspaper, as well as the Russian Archives that had allegedly falsified documents about Stalin’s role in the Katyn case. A different lawsuit demanded that the Russian State Duma retract its resolution *On the Katyn Tragedy and its Victims* and that the 342 Duma members who backed the resolution be forced to pay 100,000,000 rubles in compensation. Thanks to the active intercession by a number of democratically oriented members of the Memorial society, these lawsuits were dismissed.

Recent Scholarly Debate and the Work of the Memorial Society

Both in Russia and abroad, the declassification of documents related to Katyn massacre prompted a number of new publications. Based on a broad selection of archival documents, the monograph *Class Cleansing: The Massacre at Katyn* deserves special mention.³⁴ Its author, the outstanding historian and sociologist Victor Zaslavsky (1939–2009), emigrated from the USSR in 1975 and later taught in Italy, Canada, and the United States. This book won the Hannah Arendt Prize and played an important role in reconstructing the real history of this crime by the totalitarian Soviet regime, in overcoming its consequences in contemporary Russia, and in spreading awareness of the true nature of Katyn among the international scientific community and public opinion.

It would be impossible not to mention the posthumous edition of the thorough study by Andrzej Przewoźnik (who died in the Smolensk air crash in 2010) *Katyń: Zbrodnia, Prawo, Pamięć* (Katyn: Crime, Truth,

eds., *Belye piatna-chernye piatna. Slozhnye voprosy rossiisko-polskikh otnoshenii* (Moscow: Aspekt Press, 2010).

³⁴ V. Zaslavsky, *Class Cleansing: The Massacre at Katyn* (Candor, NY: Telos Press, 2008).

Memory), completed by his assistant, Jolanta Adamska,³⁵ whose publication very nearly coincided with Przewoźnik's short contribution to the Russian-Polish edition of *Gaps and Shadows*.³⁶ Both publications also deal with various aspects of the discourse on Katyn in Russia.

Thanks to the efforts of the American professor Anna Maria Cienčila, Russian scholar Nataliya Lebedeva, and Polish scholar Wojciech Materski, a valuable collection of Katyn documents selected from the four-volume Russian-Polish edition was published in English.³⁷ The British scholar George Sanford likewise published a book on the Katyn massacre based on the material contained in the same four-volume edition of Katyn materials.³⁸ The interested reader can find other literature on Katyn in several languages in an exhaustive recently published bibliography.³⁹

On a different level, Arseny Roginsky, the director of the Memorial society, his deputy Nikita Petrov, and the director of the Polish branch of the society, Aleksandr Guryanov, have conducted a systematic investigation on the Katyn case from a scientific, political, and legal point of view. According to them, the appropriate legal framework was established at Nuremberg. If what took place was the elimination of prisoners of war, then the massacre itself must be considered a war crime (although one might object that there was no state of war between the two countries at the time of the massacre).

Memorial society activists assist the family members and friends of the victims in their search for justice, and support them against the attacks of Stalinists. Petrov is working on putting together the lists of the NKVD executioners, whose biographies he will publish.

³⁵ A. Przewoźnik and J. Adamska, *Katyń: Zbrodnia, Prawo, Pamięć* (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2010).

³⁶ Torkunov and Rotfeld, *Belye piatna-chernye piatna*, 304–37.

³⁷ A.M. Cienčila, N.S. Lebedeva, and W. Materski, eds., *Katyn: A Crime without Punishment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007). See also *Zbrodnia Katyńska. Bibliografia 1940–2010*; A.M. Cienčila, "The Katyn Syndrome," *Russian Review* 65 (2006): 117–21; I. Yazhborovskaia, "Russian Historical Writing About the Crime of Katyn," 139–57. (Anna Cienčila systematically reviews and translates Russian publications on Katyn.)

³⁸ G. Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940: Truth, Justice and Memory* (London: Routledge, 2005).

³⁹ *Zbrodnia Katyńska*.

The Memorial society continues its tenacious battle to bring to light the circumstances of the Katyn massacre and to rehabilitate the Polish victims of Stalinist repression. In an article, published in *Novaia gazeta* on November 29, 2010, Aleksandr Guryanov has listed four fundamental legal steps that still need to be carried out:

First, an adequate legal definition of the Katyn crime must be established . . . Second, the identity of all those responsible for the massacre must be ascertained before a court of law. By laying the blame on a limited number of ministerial-level functionaries, the chief military prosecutor's office excluded Stalin and others members of Soviet leadership from the circle of main culprits and instigators of the Katyn massacre, classified twenty years ago as a heinous Stalinist crime and today as an abuse by the totalitarian state. Third, by virtue of the law in effect in the Russian Federation "On the Rehabilitation of the Victims of Political Repressions," it is absolutely necessary to identify by name each of the Polish prisoners of war and the detainees shot following the Politburo directive of March 5, 1940, as victims of political repression. To this day, the chief military prosecutor refuses not only to recognize the political motive behind the prisoners' summary execution (even though it is unequivocally stated in the declassified Politburo document: Beria's memorandum to Stalin proposing liquidation of Polish prisoners of war and other detainees "as inveterate and incorrigible enemies of Soviet power"), but also to acknowledge the very fact that the prisoners were indeed executed. And this is true even in the case of the bodies identified during the exhumations in the Katyn Forest and in other common graves, including exhumations carried out by the chief military prosecutor's office itself! Fourth, all the materials having to do with the investigation on the Katyn case carried out by the chief military prosecutor between 1990 and 2004 must be declassified, together with the NKVD-KGB documents on the Katyn shooting, which, as revealed during a recent trial, are being held in the FSB archives and continue to be kept secret!

The Memorial society has also repeatedly raised the issue of the identity of Ukrainian and Belarusian victims of the massacre, and their burial sites.

The Moral-Political Discourse and Historical Verification

In September 2009, Russian authorities embarked on a policy of improved relations with Poland, including bringing closure to the Katyn case. On the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the massacre, on April 7, 2010, Russian prime minister Vladimir Putin, accompanied by his Polish counterpart Donald Tusk, again firmly condemned the mass slaughter during their visit to the Katyn memorial. Putin emphasized that “there can be no justifications for such a crime” and that their evaluation “is not subject to revision.”⁴⁰ On April 18, in Kraków, during the funeral for the president of the Polish Republic Lech Kaczyński and his wife, who were killed in the Smolensk air crash, the President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev solemnly reaffirmed that “the tragedy of Katyn was a crime committed by Stalin and his henchmen.”⁴¹ During these meetings, and in the course of the following official visit to Poland on December 6 and 7, 2010, Medvedev reiterated Stalin’s responsibility for the Katyn crime and for the historical falsification that followed. These admissions were favorably received by the Russian and Polish public opinion.

Nevertheless, those who oppose bringing closure to the Katyn case have recently attempted to reassemble the falsified elements of the political, scientific, and legal treatment of the matter, hoping to set the debate back to square one, to the positions of the Soviet era, in the spirit of the Burdenko Commission and its supporters. Their overt goal is not only to delay and undermine the just resolution of the case, but also to defend Stalin from charges of state terrorism, thus strengthening their own political positions.

Thus, the communist member of the Duma and vice president of the State Duma Committee on Legislation and State Reform, Viktor Ilyukhin, organized a voluntary commission on Katyn. In response to Putin’s statement of April 7, admitting Stalin’s responsibility, Ilyukhin quickly organized a roundtable on the legal and political aspects of the Katyn case, which took place on April 19. During this roundtable,

⁴⁰ www.premier.gov.ru, April 7, 2010.

⁴¹ www.echo.msk.ru, April 18, 2010.

the old Soviet version of the events was presented and “enriched” by alleged new “discoveries.” The roundtable participants volunteered to continue the investigation to the point of exhuming the victims’ remains, in order to disprove the previous findings and deny Soviet responsibility for the massacre.⁴² Ilyukhin summarized the results of the roundtable in a letter to President Medvedev, which he also published on the website of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation.

On November 26, 2010, the resolution On the Katyn Tragedy and Its Victims was put to a vote and approved by an absolute majority of the members of the State Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament (with only 12.7% opposing the measure). This was the first time that state terrorism against Polish nationals was officially and publicly acknowledged in Russia. Earlier admissions, by Gorbachev and Yeltsin, had been addressed to Poles and had little resonance in Russian. The situation is very different today. It has been openly admitted that “published materials, hidden in secret archives for many years, not only reveal the magnitude of this enormous tragedy, but also confirm that the Katyn crime was carried out following the direct orders of Stalin and other Soviet leaders.” The resolution also underlined that mass persecution of either Russian or foreign citizens is incompatible with the primacy of law and justice, and announced the intent to ascertain all of the circumstances that led to the mass execution of Polish nationals, an act of “abuse by the totalitarian state,” and to clear the names of all the victims of Katyn and other massacres. The resolution noted that the victims “have already been fully rehabilitated by history,”⁴³ but left the question of their official rehabilitation as still pending.

Ilyukhin’s proposal to create a new structure within the Duma charged with reopening the investigation on the Katyn case and

⁴² *Tainy Katynskoi tragedii. Materialy “kruglogo stola” po teme “Katynskaia tragediia: pravovye i politicheskie aspekty,” provedennogo 19 apreliia 2010 goda v Gosudarstvennoi Dume Federalnogo Sobraniia Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Vystupleniia uchastnikov “kruglogo stola” daiutsia v avtorskoi redaktsii* [The mysteries of the Katyn tragedy. Proceedings from the “Roundtable” on “The Katyn tragedy: legal and political aspects”], ed. V.I. Ilyukhin, Moscow, 2010. Prilozhenie k zhurnalu *Politicheskoe prosveshchenie*.

⁴³ *O Katynskoi tragedii i ee zhertvakh. Zaiavlenie Gosudarstvennoi Dumy o rasstrele v Katynskom lesu*, www.polit.ru/dossie2010/11/26/katyn/html.

reexamining the alleged forged documents failed to gain traction with other parties, and was not even put up to a vote.

During 2010, Russia made several conciliatory gestures toward Poland. In May of 2010, President Medvedev handed 67 volumes of declassified documents—selected out of the 183 volumes constituting the entire collection of Katyn materials—over to Bronisław Komorowski, the President of Poland at the time. On Medvedev's orders, a process of declassification of the documents contained in the other volumes was also set in motion. In September of the same year, the Russian prosecutor gave Poland 20 additional volumes of declassified materials. In early December of 2010, before Medvedev's visit to Warsaw, Polish authorities were provided with yet another 50 volumes. These rapidly unfolding events significantly broadened the discourse of the Katyn affair, bringing in new elements and aspects. During the joint press conference by the presidents Bronisław Komorowski and Medvedev in Warsaw, on December 6, 2010, the latter emphasized:

We shall continue in this direction, which we have consciously chosen. I have made a decision and we will not abandon it. We must know the truth. This is necessary for Poles, and no less necessary for our citizens, for Russians, because our history has been marked by tragic events, which brought suffering to many, many people, not all of them Polish—an enormous number of Russian citizens also disappeared during the repressions. We must get to the bottom of this issue in the greatest detail and with the utmost seriousness.⁴⁴

While the fundamental facts have now been cleared up, it is as important as ever to remain vigilant and continue on the path of scientific and historical research, because the “Katyn syndrome” has proven extremely obstinate and insidious. Continuous historical verification is necessary to excise the syndrome's dangerous mythological and ideological elements. First set in motion by the research of the Joint Commission on the “blind-spots” in bilateral relations (1987–90), the scientific discourse is currently being carried out by the Group on

⁴⁴ *Russian President. Official site: Joint Press Conference with the President of Poland Bronisław Komorowski*, <http://news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/9714>.

Complex Issues in Russian-Polish Relations. The above-cited *White Spots, Black Spots* collection, edited by Academician A.V. Torkunov and Prof. A.D. Rotfeld, makes it possible to contrast and compare the positions of scholars on both sides of the debate, and to continue on the path of dialogue.⁴⁵ The international conference titled “Poland-Russia, Difficult Questions (Three Narratives: History, Literature, Film),” held in Kraków, October 5–7, 2010, was devoted to discussing these matters. These kinds of events favor a profound transformation of the Katyn discourse, broadening its scope and healing the ideological deformations, and thereby neutralizing the perturbing effect of the “Katyn syndrome” on the bilateral relations between the two countries.

Current Relevance of the Legal Aspects of the Katyn Case

To date, the flaws in Russian law and especially the Russian legal system, which have recurred in various courts and proceedings in Moscow, the stubborn recourse to the inadequate norms of the outdated Stalinist criminal code, and the entrenched practice of the political manipulation of judges have meant that legal actions initiated by the family members of the Katyn victims have not been accepted, or even examined. The reasons offered for this have been many, often specious and illogical: the very fact of executions has been called into question; it has been demanded that the criminal proceedings be initiated personally by the injured party; the impossibility of rehabilitating victims for lack of official convictions or other formal documents; the lack of definitive identification of the exhumed remains, and so on. The absurdity of denying the very fact of the victims’ executing or demanding that they appear before the court is obvious, but another modern “anti-Katyn” tactic warrants special emphasis: the problem of the victims’ identification. That the matter still has to be addressed seventy years after the fact is in itself an insult to the victims’ memory, especially given the repeated exhumations of the remains. The number of victims officially identified by the chief military prosecutor’s office

⁴⁵ Torkunov and Rotfeld, *Belye piatna-chernye piatna*.

is twenty-two. This is a provocation worthy of the Stalinist era, which archly refuses to acknowledge the identification of 2,800 remains carried out by the Technical Committee of the Polish Red Cross, even though it was conducted under the supervision of German guards.

The formal arguments regarding lacking legal documentation for the rehabilitation of the victims are unconvincing, for the following reasons. First, recourse to the 1926 Criminal Code is improper, for that text does not contain the articles appropriate to the nature and scale of the crime. Second, the Politburo's decision of March 5, 1940 authorizing the execution of Polish prisoners of war was unlawful. The victims were not shot based on findings of guilt, corresponding to criminal charges adjudicated in a court of law, but based on decisions by the so-called *troiki*, the improvised tribunals made up of three NKVD operatives devoid of any semblance of legal standing. It was a pure act of totalitarian terror. The prosecution did not present any documents, as called for by the law, so the absence of such documents cannot be ascribe to loss or any other legitimate reason. Nor did the reading of the verdict take place. It is quite apparent that the sentences were issued based on an illegal procedure. This is confirmed by a document from the highest Soviet authority of the time, the March 5 Politburo resolution, that dispensed with any need for legal reasoning. The motives behind the charges were part of the legal narrative, as was the sentence (in intentional violation of legal procedures). The perfecting of the legal system is a task of the greatest importance for present-day Russia.

On these grounds, a suit was filed with the European Court of Human Rights, in Strasburg, which has accepted to adjudicate it as a matter of highest priority.

Until it is definitively resolved in Russia, the Katyn case will continue to be a destabilizing element in Russian-Polish relations. For the latter to be normalized, legal discourse must be consistently advanced and developed.

The very definition of the crime perpetrated in Katyn⁴⁶ is one of the more controversial points. The concept and the definition of genocide are established by international law, whose regulations have been

⁴⁶ Yazhborovskaia, Yablokov, and Parsadanova, *Katynskii sindrom*, 457–60.

recognized by the Soviet Union and subsequently by Russia, but not included in the Russian internal criminal code. The Russian Constitution recognizes the primacy of international law. Following a proposal by the USSR, the massacre of thousands of Polish prisoners of war in the Katyn forest was defined in accordance with article 6 of the charter of the International Military Tribunal (IMT), and was to appear as part of the indictment the Allies agreed to present at the Nuremberg Trials.⁴⁷

It should be noted that the decision to define the Katyn crime as falling under article 6 of the IMT charter was made at a time when Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, Mikoyan, Kalinin, and Kaganovich still embodied supreme power in the USSR, so to all intents and purposes, it was their decision. Thus, in the Soviet Union the crime of Katyn found a definition that conformed to the regulations of international law, was valid in that same historical period, and was accepted by the very people responsible for the crime. This definition was never publicly withdrawn. A decree promulgated by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on March 4, 1965, stated that the internal legislation codified certain crimes, such as crimes against peace and against humanity, as well as war crimes falling within the scope of article 6 of the IMT charter and entailing criminal responsibility “regardless of when they were committed.”⁴⁸

According to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of December 9, 1948, ratified by the USSR on March 18, 1954, “genocide” denotes an act committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. Based on the Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity of November 26, 1968, ratified by the USSR on March 11, 1969, statutory limitations do not apply to the following crimes, without regard for the time of their occurrence:

⁴⁷ Nuremberg Trial, vol. 7, Moscow 1961, 195–260, and 307–515 of the Russian edition.

⁴⁸ *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR*, 10, 1965, 123.

- a) War crimes, as defined by the charter of the International Military Tribunal . . .
- b) Crimes against humanity . . . as defined by the charter of the International Military Tribunal . . ., as well as crimes of genocide, as defined by the 1948 Convention . . ., even if these acts do not constitute a violation of the internal law of the country where they were perpetrated.⁴⁹

Hence, the international law statutes entailing criminal responsibility for these crimes have been adopted by the Russian legal system, and they should prevail over the general prohibition on the retroactive application of laws, because this exception was explicitly identified in the international agreements. As a result, there are no real legal impediments to recognizing the crime of Katyn according to the articles of the charter of the IMT of Nuremberg and to statutes of international law.

For the future of Russia, for solving Russia's foreign and domestic problems, the closure of the Katyn case is of particular import and relevance.

The Smolensk airplane catastrophe has brought the need to put an end to the Katyn syndrome back to the fore, as an essential condition for normalizing the relations with Poland once and for all. President Medvedev has taken the matter under his own control, and the current position of Russian leadership gives some hope that progress will be made toward finally bringing closure to this tragedy, one of the most heinous crimes of the Soviet authoritarian-totalitarian regime.

⁴⁹ *Vedomosti Verchovnogo Soveta SSSR*, 2, 1971, 18.

Totalitarianism and Science

The Nazi and the Soviet Experience

DAVID HOLLOWAY

Nazism and Stalinism constitute the core of the totalitarian experience. The term totalitarianism has been much discussed and much criticized, but it remains useful for distinguishing regimes that sought to exercise an unprecedented degree of control over society. As François Furet has written, “both regimes, and they alone, set in motion the destruction of the civil order by the absolute submission of individuals to the ideology and terror of the party-state.”¹ To put these two regimes into the category of totalitarianism is not to suggest that they were identical or comparable in every way, but rather to indicate that they were different from other authoritarian regimes by virtue of the degree of control they sought to exercise over society and by the pervasive role of ideology and terror in their methods of rule. Both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in the Stalin years were leaders in science, and this naturally prompts the question: What was the relationship between science and totalitarianism?²

There has been a wide range of answers to this question. Some see science and totalitarianism as fundamentally hostile to each other. Those who take this view commonly focus on science as the activity of a community governed by particular norms of behavior. In the 1930s and 1940s the sociologist Robert Merton developed a highly influential

¹ Quoted by Juan J. Linz in his *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 4.

² See the discussion in Y.M. Rabkin and E.Z. Mirskaya, “Science and Totalitarianism: Lessons for the Twenty-First Century,” in *Science and Ideology: A Comparative History*, ed. M. Walker (London: Routledge, 2003), 17–34.

theory of the ethos of science, which identified four norms that govern the practice of science: universalism (truth claims are evaluated on the basis of impersonal criteria), communism (scientific knowledge is common intellectual property), disinterestedness (particular interests do not shape conclusions), and organized skepticism (rigorous testing of all ideas).³ Merton's theory supported the widespread assumption that science would flourish best in democracies. With Germany and the Soviet Union in mind, he wrote in 1942: "in modern totalitarian society, anti-rationalism and the centralization of institutional control both serve to limit the scope provided for scientific activity."⁴

Still others regard totalitarianism as a product of modernity and science. Proponents of this view usually focus not on the practice of science but on science as an instrument of control. According to Vaclav Havel, for example, the end of communism signified "the end of the modern world as a whole." In Havel's view, communism was the perverse extreme of the dominant modern belief that "the world . . . is a wholly knowable system governed by a finite number of universal laws that man can grasp and rationally direct for his own benefit."⁵ In this interpretation, the sense that all problems can be solved, which is inherent in totalitarianism, derives from science.

This chapter poses a number of questions about the experience of natural science and natural scientists under Nazism and Stalinism and suggests answers based on numerous studies that have been written about science under those regimes. The questions are: What impact did those regimes have on science? How did scientists behave under totalitarian rule? Did science support these regimes and how did it do so? What is the relationship between science and freedom? These are complicated questions and cannot be explored here in great detail

³ R.K. Merton, "The Normative Structure of Science," which was written in 1942, in *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 267–78.

⁴ Merton, "The Normative Structure," 278. Karl Popper wrote that ultimately scientific "progress depends very largely on political factors; on political institutions that safeguard the freedom of thought: on democracy." K. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 155.

⁵ V. Havel, "The End of the Modern Era," *New York Times*, March 1, 1992, section 4, 15.

because of the space constraints. Nevertheless, they allow one to approach the complex and multifaceted relationship between science and totalitarianism from a number of different angles.

Two major differences between Nazi and Stalinist rule should be noted at the outset. The first is obvious: the Nazi regime existed for a much shorter time than the Soviet Union. Hitler's rule lasted for twelve years, and for half of them Germany was fighting a war that ended in terrible destruction and crushing defeat (which of course the Soviet Union played the major part in bringing about). Soviet power, by contrast, persisted for seventy-four years, and Stalin was the unchallenged ruler from 1929 to 1953, twice as long as Hitler. As a result, the relationship between science and totalitarianism had a longer history in the Soviet Union and there was therefore more time for the implications of totalitarian rule to become apparent.

The second difference is the position of science in Nazi and Soviet ideology. Marx and Engels aimed to create a scientific account of the historical development of social formations, and their analysis of capitalism led them to the conclusion that it would be overthrown by a revolution in which the working class would come to power. The Bolsheviks maintained that they were guided in their actions by Marxist analysis, by science (scientific socialism), not by ideals (utopian socialism). This was an important part of the Bolsheviks' claim to the right to rule. (How important it was in practice is perhaps another question.) It was of course the social sciences that they were guided by, not natural science; but the Russian term (*nauka*), like its German equivalent (*Wissenschaft*), covers both, and Marxists went to considerable efforts to demonstrate the continuity between social and natural science in terms of methodology (*the dialectic*) and philosophy (*materialism*).⁶

Science played a different role in Nazi ideology. The Nazis did not claim that their right to rule rested on a scientific understanding of the laws of historical development. They did draw heavily, however, on medical science and eugenics to legitimize their racial policies

⁶ See, for example, F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959) and V.I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism: critical comments on a reactionary philosophy* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947).

and to guide their efforts to create what they regarded as a healthy *Volksgemeinschaft*. Nazism was in important respects a reactionary ideology, harking back to a pre-modern world, but as Jeffrey Herf makes clear in his *Reactionary Modernism*, right-wing German thinking in the early part of the twentieth century managed to incorporate a vision of technological progress into its backward-looking worldview.⁷

How Did Totalitarian Rule Affect Science?

The answer to this question is not straightforward. Both the Nazi and Stalinist regimes adopted policies that greatly weakened scientific research. Nazi racial policies did enormous harm to German science. The Civil Service Law of April 1933 resulted in the expulsion of Jews from universities and research institutes. Many of those expelled were eminent scientists, and a considerable number of them left the country.⁸ In the Soviet Union numerous scientists were arrested, imprisoned, and killed as a result of Stalinist repression. The weakening of the Ukrainian Institute of Physics and Technology in Kharkov through political intrigues and arrests is one notable example from the Great Terror.⁹

While the repressive policies of the two regimes had harmful consequences for science, it is the relationship between political authority and scientific knowledge that has aroused most interest among historians and sociologists. The totalitarian structure of power affected the kinds of arguments scientists could make in defending or criticizing particular scientific theories or paradigms; it also affected the consequences that could follow from winning or losing those arguments. One notable case was the attack by proponents of *Deutsche Physik* on relativity theory and quantum mechanics. The leading figures in the

⁷ J. Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁸ See, for example, the list of émigrés from the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes in K. Macrakis, *Surviving the Swastika* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 207–14.

⁹ It is the subject of one of the classic memoirs about the Stalin period: A. Weissberg, *The Accused* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951).

movement were Philipp Lenard and Johannes Stark, both Nobel prize-winners in physics and both deeply anti-Semitic; Lenard was an early member of the Nazi Party, while Stark joined in 1930. As a Jew and a socialist, Einstein was a particular object of Nazi hatred; he was abroad when the Nazis took power and did not return to Germany. Werner Heisenberg, one of the founders of quantum mechanics, remained in Germany and became the prime target of the *Deutsche Physik* movement. He was not a Jew, but quantum mechanics was attacked because its abstract quality made it “non-Aryan,” that is characteristic of Jewish thought. An article in the SS newspaper *Das Schwarze Korps* in July 1937 accused Heisenberg of being a “white Jew,” of propagating “Jewish contaminated science,” but Heinrich Himmler gave Heisenberg a clean bill of health, on political and personal as much as scientific grounds.¹⁰ Stark and Lenard were deeply opposed to modern theoretical physics and sought to win their disciplinary fight by resort to political accusations. They had some success in influencing appointments to physics chairs, but their success was limited.¹¹

The claim of the ruling Party’s right to adjudicate scientific disputes was much more in evidence in the Soviet Union, most notably in the case of Lysenko. In the late 1920s and early 1930s Trofim Lysenko introduced novel plant breeding practices that aroused the interest of agricultural administrators and leading geneticists. His advice appeared to be useful in farming, but in the 1930s he grew increasingly hostile to genetics, accusing geneticists who opposed him of political and ideological deviations. With Stalin’s support he came to occupy leading administrative positions in science, but at the end of World War II it looked as though his opponents, with the help of senior Party officials, would succeed in destroying his influence. It was Stalin who saved him by giving his approval to a report Lysenko had prepared for a conference on the situation in biological science in August 1948, thereby enabling him to defeat his opponents. Lysenko used his dominant

¹⁰ Translations of the article and of Himmler’s letter of July 21, 1938 to Heisenberg can be found in English in K. Hentschel, ed. *Physics and National Socialism: an Anthology of Primary Sources* (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag, 1996), 152–57 and 176–77.

¹¹ D.C. Cassidy, *Beyond Uncertainty: Heisenberg, Quantum Physics, and the Bomb* (New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2009), 245–51 and 268–81.

position to put an end to research in genetics, doing enormous damage to Soviet biology.¹²

Stalin's intervention raised a crucial question: Who had the right to define scientific knowledge? Stalin also provided the answer: the Central Committee—in effect Stalin—had that right. He appears to have taken this responsibility seriously. He organized discussions on linguistics, physiology, and political economy in the early 1950s. He published his thoughts on linguistics and political economy and gave conspiratorial advice on the conference on physiology. But there was a problem: if he could adjudicate the truth or falsity of scientific theories, how was he to know what was true and what was false? It is tempting to see Stalin, in his last writings, grappling with this problem: How was he to use the authority the Party claimed on questions of science without harming the science on which the power of the state was coming increasingly to depend? His decision in March 1949 to postpone, at the last minute, a conference on physics and its philosophical interpretation for which intensive preparations had been made, epitomizes this problem, for it was taken in response to warnings from senior nuclear scientists that the conference would interfere with the development of the atomic bomb.¹³

Science survived the totalitarian experience, notwithstanding Nazi racial policies and Stalinist repression. Germany was perhaps the dominant scientific country in 1933. Nazi policies weakened the universities, but industrial firms kept their research laboratories and the Kaiser Wilhelm Society had built up a network of very powerful institutes, which continued to do serious work under Nazi rule. The government increased spending on research as long as the research was relevant to war and the preparation for war. Kristie Macrakis concludes in *Surviving the Swastika* that science in Nazi Germany “not only survived but often thrived.”¹⁴

¹² On Lysenko, see, for example, D. Joravsky, *The Lysenko Affair* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005) and N. Roll-Hansen, *The Lysenko Effect: The Politics of Science* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2005).

¹³ For a detailed discussion of this whole period, see E. Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Macrakis, *Surviving the Swastika*, 199.

The Soviet Union invested heavily in science in the Stalin years, in the belief that science would lay the basis for new technologies and thereby help to turn the Soviet Union into a great military-industrial power. The Soviet Academy of Sciences created many new institutes, while the industrial ministries set up research institutes of their own. Some fields flourished in those terrible years, notably physics and mathematics.¹⁵ The fate of genetics was part of the picture, but only a part. Scientific communities showed a remarkable resilience in the face of great pressure, and powerful scientific schools developed with the help of resources supplied by the state.

It would be a mistake, however, to paint too rosy a picture, to move from the view that science will flourish only in a democracy to the view that science can do just as well in any kind of political regime. Funding for scientific research increased under totalitarian rule, but other conditions that are normally regarded as essential for science, such as easy contact with foreign scientists, were severely curtailed: the number of foreign scientific visitors to German universities fell sharply after 1933, while from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s Soviet scientists had almost no personal contact with scientists from abroad. There were important achievements in Soviet physics during the Stalin years, but at the end of the Stalin period many Soviet scientists were very unhappy about the state of Soviet science. The physicist Peter Kapitsa wrote to Stalin in July 1952 to lament the poor condition of Soviet science, and he was not alone in his concerns.¹⁶ The situation in biology was understood by many to be disastrous. After Stalin's death biologists and physicists sent collective letters to the Central Committee asking for a reversal of the August 1948 session on biology and for the revival of genetics. Khrushchev was angry: he described the letters as scandalous, and maintained his support for Lysenko.¹⁷ Nor was everything well in the German case. The discovery of nuclear fission by Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassmann in December 1938 (for which Hahn got the 1944 Nobel Prize

¹⁵ See, for example, A.B. Kojevnikov, *Stalin's Great Science: The Times and Adventures of Soviet Physicists* (London: Imperial College Press, 2004).

¹⁶ D. Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 356.

¹⁷ Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb*, 357–58.

in Chemistry) was made at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Chemistry in Berlin-Dahlem. It has been claimed that this is evidence of the continuing quality of German research. But it was two refugees from Nazism—Lise Meitner and Otto Frisch—who provided the theoretical explanation for the results Hahn and Strassmann had obtained.¹⁸

For all the travails it underwent, science nevertheless survived and prospered in some respects under totalitarian rule. The Nazis inherited a very strong scientific community and, although they inflicted great harm on it, they also supported science, especially those areas of research that might contribute to military power. The Soviet Union built up a large network of research institutes and, although Stalinist repression did great damage to the scientific community and to some disciplines in particular, science did thrive in the Stalin years. It is true that through their policies Nazism and Stalinism prevented the full potential of science from being realized, but one cannot say that science and totalitarianism proved to be incompatible.

How Did Scientists Behave under Totalitarian Rule?

There were many responses to totalitarian rule among scientists in Germany and the Soviet Union. Some scientists went into exile; some supported the regimes with enthusiasm; some went into “interior emigration”; some engaged in various forms of resistance or opposition; some focused on their science in the belief that science would prove to be a civilizing force. In many cases the motives of scientists are difficult to grasp precisely because totalitarian rule made them reluctant to express their real views openly.

Kapitsa is an interesting case. In 1921 he went from Russia to Cambridge, where he pursued a very successful career at the Cavendish Laboratory until 1934, when he was prevented from returning to Cambridge after a visit to the Soviet Union. He gradually adjusted to life in Moscow as the director of a new institute. In August 1945 he was

¹⁸ See, for example, R.J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 311.

one of the two scientists—the other was Igor Kurchatov—appointed to the Special Committee on the Atomic Bomb, which was chaired by Lavrentiy Beria. In December 1945 Kapitsa resigned from the committee, writing to Stalin to complain about Beria's management of the project. "Beria has the conductor's baton in his hand," Kapitsa wrote. But Beria's basic weakness, he added, "is that the conductor ought not only to wave the baton, but also to understand the score."¹⁹ Kapitsa did not voice at that time or later any objection to the Soviet Union's building the bomb, though many believed that he had withdrawn from the project for some combination of moral and political reasons. Kapitsa's letters to Stalin do not support that interpretation, but if that had been his view he would surely not have expressed it in those terms to Stalin. That would have been tantamount to signing one's own death warrant. The point here is not to make a judgment about Kapitsa's motives but to suggest how difficult making such a judgment can be.

Perhaps the most controversial case is that of Werner Heisenberg. In his play *Copenhagen*, which deals with the encounter between Heisenberg and Niels Bohr in September 1941, Michael Frayn shows how very difficult it is to make moral judgments about people if we do not have a clear understanding of their motives.²⁰ Heisenberg's role in the Nazi atomic project has been the subject of very different interpretations. He was the leading scientist in the project, and some historians have argued that although he knew how an atomic bomb could be built, he withheld that information from the Nazi authorities for moral and political reasons.²¹ Others have argued that Heisenberg wanted to make the bomb but failed because he did not understand how it could be done; that in particular he greatly overestimated the amount of uranium-235 needed for a nuclear explosion or, at any rate, was not completely clear in his own mind that only kilograms rather than tons were needed. At the end of the war the British interned Heisenberg and other leading German scientist at Farm Hall, a safe

¹⁹ Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb*, 140.

²⁰ M. Frayn, *Copenhagen* (London: Methuen Drama, 1998).

²¹ Notably T. Powers in his *Heisenberg's War: The Secret History of the German Bomb* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

house near Cambridge. The house was bugged, and the transcripts of the conversations among the scientists indicate that Heisenberg did not consciously sabotage the German project.²²

There may be validity, however, to the more subtle point that antipathy to the Nazi regime made some scientists, including Heisenberg, less than eager to develop the bomb and therefore less determined to think through the problems.²³ The Soviet physicist Evgenii Feinberg, in an interesting book about physicists including Heisenberg, writes that he does not believe that Heisenberg sabotaged the German bomb project, but he is more sympathetic to Heisenberg than many Western critics.²⁴ He argues that a careful analysis of Heisenberg's behavior in the early years of the war suggests that he was not wholeheartedly trying to build the bomb: he worked on topics not connected with the bomb project and also spent time writing a book on philosophy. Feinberg points out that some of the things for which Heisenberg has been criticized—reporting to the Gestapo about his September 1941 trip to Copenhagen, for example—were unavoidable in a totalitarian state. “The point of view of the author,” he writes, “is different from assessments given by people who did not have the misfortune to live under such an inhuman dictatorship.”²⁵

Precisely because Nazism and Stalinism were responsible for such great evils, it is impossible to avoid moral judgments, even when we try to understand how those regimes came into being, how they functioned, and how they persisted. Perhaps for that reason there is a temptation to think in terms of heroes and villains when looking at scientists under totalitarian rule. But that can be misleading. To think only in those categories is to run the risk of missing the subtlety and complexity of human nature; disillusionment may set in when “heroes” are seen to be, after all, complicated human beings. This of course does not mean

²² *Operation Epsilon: The Farm Hall Transcripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 5, 70–91.

²³ E.L. Feinberg, *Epokha i lichnost: fiziki* (Moscow: Fizmatlit, 2003), 356.

²⁴ See, for example, P.L. Rose, *Heisenberg and the Nazi Atomic Bomb Project: A Study in German Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

²⁵ Feinberg, *Epokha i lichnost*, 5.

that everyone acted in the same way. Feinberg writes in his book about physicists he knew who preserved their integrity as individuals in the face of fear and terrible ordeals “in the course of tragic decades for our country.”²⁶ Among the physicists he admired who were active in the Stalin period are Leonid Mandelshtam, Sergei Vavilov, and Lev Landau, as well as Kapitsa—men who showed courage in defending physics and in seeking the release of colleagues who had been arrested.

The scientists who are now admired are those who defended their science, like the physicists Max von Laue in Germany or Igor Tamm in the Soviet Union; those who are most despised are those who used political accusations in the way that Stark and Lenard did. One cannot say that the latter were less sincere than the former, or that they did not believe in what they advocated. Nor can one deny that the defenders of modern physics also appealed to the authorities for support. The most important difference between Stark and Lenard and their opponents was that the former used racist criteria in assessing physics and on that basis tried to invoke the support of the Nazi leadership. Their opponents also turned to the political authorities, but mainly to gain recognition of the right of the physics community to decide what constituted scientific knowledge.

In the grand scheme of things this may not seem to be a momentous occurrence, compared with plotting to assassinate Hitler or standing up for human rights as Andrei Sakharov did in the Brezhnev years. From a political point of view the defense of science and scientists might even seem merely self-interested. But it required courage and a sense of civic responsibility to act as Kapitsa or Tamm did. It was, moreover, possible in a way that full-scale criticism of the system was not practicable under Nazism and Stalinism. By defending the claim of scientific communities to come to their own conclusions about what constituted scientific knowledge, scientists were defending a small corner of civil society against the totalitarian state.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

How Was Science Used as an Instrument of Power and Legitimacy?

Both the Nazi and Stalinist regimes invested heavily in science, for utilitarian and above all military purposes. They hoped that scientific research would help to create new and better weapons and protect troops against disease. The Nazi regime required that expenditures on science be justified in terms of their contribution to the country's capacity to wage war.²⁷ After World War II Stalin raised scientists' pay and increased expenditures on science, since science-based technologies like the atomic bomb, radar, and rocketry had become vital for the creation of military power.²⁸ Some of the choices made by these two regimes may not have been very sensible—the V-2 rocket is a good example of an expensive project that contributed very little to the German war effort—but the goal of using science to enhance the power of the state is perfectly understandable. The United States and Britain were doing just the same thing at the time and doing it more successfully, for example with regard to the Manhattan Project and radar development. The United States and Britain benefited greatly from the emigration of scientists from Nazi Germany. They were much more hospitable to them than the Soviet Union was. Some German and Austrian scientists who went to the Soviet Union in the 1930s were handed over to the Gestapo at the time of the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

The more interesting question is how the two regimes used science to legitimate their power. Science played an important role in the Communist Party's claim to rule, and for that reason the Party regarded science not only as an instrument of power but also as the embodiment of a set of values with which it wished to indoctrinate the society: scientific management; scientific atheism; and scientific communism, for example, were widely propagated. "Scientific" was a term of approval, an indication that the activity was solidly grounded. As Modest Rubenstein, one of the leading propagandists of science and technology, put it in a pamphlet for foreign readers in 1932, the Soviet Union was the first

²⁷ Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, 310–11.

²⁸ Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb*, 148–49.

experiment in which “a genuinely scientific theory” was being applied to the construction and control of social and economic life, as well as to the management of science and technology.²⁹

The Nazis did not make the same kind of claim about their right to rule, but they did draw on science for legitimation in the crucial area of racial policy. In March 1943, Eugen Fischer, former director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics, wrote:

It is a rare and special good fortune for a theoretical science to flourish at a time when the prevailing ideology welcomes it, and its findings can immediately serve the policy of the state. The study of human heredity was already sufficiently mature to provide this, when years ago National Socialism was recasting not only the state but also our ways of thinking and feeling. Not that National Socialism needed a “scientific” foundation as proof that it was right; ideologies are formed through practical experience and struggle rather than through laborious scientific theorizing. However the results of the study of human heredity became absolutely indispensable as a basis for the important laws and regulations created by the new state.³⁰

German medical science did not create Nazi racism, but it gave it a veneer of scientific respectability and helped to shape the policies through which it was enacted. Scientists like Fischer helped to define the racial categories incorporated into the 1935 Nuremberg Racial Laws. We now know much more about heredity, but the theories advanced by eugenicists cannot easily be dismissed as pseudoscience since they were widely accepted by the relevant scientific communities at the time.³¹

²⁹ M. Rubenstein, *Science, Technology, and Economics under Capitalism and in the Soviet Union* (Moscow: Co-operative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the USSR, 1932), 35.

³⁰ Quoted in B. Müller-Hill, “Reflections of a German Scientist,” in *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2008), 196.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 185–99. Distinguishing science from pseudo-science is by no means a straightforward exercise. See S.O. Hansson, “Science and Pseudo-Science,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2008, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/pseudo-science/>.

This is in many ways a far more disturbing case than the Lysenko affair. Stalin backed Lysenko on the issue of genetics against the scientific establishment, but that establishment opposed Lysenko for as long as it could, and when resistance was no longer possible, the opposition went underground. It reemerged in the 1950s and finally succeeded in destroying Lysenko's dominant position, once Khrushchev was removed from office. In the case of Nazi racism, a large part of the medical profession, along with leading medical scientists, supported Nazi racial policies. They helped to devise and execute policies of euthanasia and involuntary sterilization, as well as inhuman experiments with concentration camp inmates. Fischer's statement is a terrible warning to those who think that bringing science to bear on policy is always a good thing: one needs to be conscientious about the science and vigilant about the policy that the science is supposed to support.

Detlev Peukert makes an argument of a different kind about the relationship between science and racism in the Nazi case.³² He claims that the limits on what the welfare state could do became apparent during the Weimar Republic. This was a severe blow to advocates of the welfare state, who had believed that just as medical science had improved public health, so the "human sciences" (sociology, psychology, and criminology) would be able to heal social ills. The Great Depression frustrated those hopes, with the result that the "human sciences" turned their attention from healing society to protecting it from harmful individuals and social groups. In this way, Peukert argues, the "Final Solution" had its origins in the spirit of science and in the desire to make society whole. This takes us back to Havel's argument that totalitarianism had its origins in the belief that society could be regulated and improved through the application of science, including the social sciences.

³² D.J.K. Peukert, "The Genesis of the 'Final Solution' from the Spirit of Science," in *Nazism and German Society*, ed. D.F. Crew, (London: Routledge, 1994), 275–99.

What is the Relationship between Science and Freedom?

This discussion points to the complexity of the relationship between science and totalitarian rule. Certainly there were clashes between the ruling Party and different scientific communities, though much more so in the Soviet Union than in Nazi Germany. But the regimes also provided generous support for science, and scientists were willing to work loyally for their country. It is partly because it seems to be the exception to this rule that the German atomic project has aroused such interest. In the Soviet Union Kapitsa was alone in refusing to work on the bomb; other scientists were perfectly willing to do so—and not grudgingly, but with enthusiasm. That does not mean that conditions for science were ideal. Far from it: racial policies and political repression did great damage to scientific communities; contact with foreign scientists was made very difficult; scientific disciplines under both Nazism and Stalinism showed a tendency to reflect the structure of politics, with some people seeking to dominate their disciplines in the way the leader (*Führer* or *vozhd*) dominated the country. Kapitsa wrote several letters to Khrushchev in the mid-1950s lamenting the poor state of the scientific community: scientists, he wrote, had been “beaten” so often that they were afraid to think for themselves.³³

The complex experience of science under totalitarianism has been reflected in the literature on Nazi science for some time, and is increasingly evident in the writing about science in the Stalin years as well. It is no longer assumed that there is a fundamental incompatibility between science and totalitarianism or that in such a system science is no more than the victim of politics. This shift has several sources. The first is that there has now been extensive research into science under Nazism and Stalinism. In the Soviet case this research is based on archival materials and oral history in a way that was not possible before the late 1980s, and it points to a situation that is more complex than that represented by the idea of an inherent conflict between science and totalitarianism. The second is that Merton’s model of the scientific

³³ Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb*, 357.

ethos has been replaced by an approach that focuses on individuals as agents and gives more weight to power and politics than Merton does.³⁴ The sociology of science has been recast in a way that does not assume that science will necessarily thrive best in a democratic society. The third is that totalitarianism as a concept plays a much smaller role in guiding research than it did at the height of the Cold War. As a result, the discussion of science under Nazism and Stalinism now encompasses a broader range of questions than it did during the Cold War.³⁵

This new perspective treats science under totalitarianism as raising the same questions—and operating in the same ways—as science in other societies. Scientists are not assumed to be mere victims of politics but are seen also as beneficiaries, involved in a close relationship with politics, exploiting the system to gain resources and also to compete with one other.³⁶ This new approach is a natural consequence of the shift in perspective, and it is a healthy one insofar as it leads to a broadening of the field of inquiry. But this “normalization” carries within itself the danger that the special features of totalitarian rule will be overlooked, and in particular the claim of those regimes to have the ultimate authority to define what counts as scientific knowledge. That claim was more in evidence under Stalinism than under Nazism: it was gradually abandoned in the post-Stalin years and finally dropped in 1964, after Khrushchev’s removal from power. Precisely because scientific authority and political authority were so closely intertwined in the Stalin years, the assertion by specialist communities of their own right to decide what constituted scientific knowledge was of political importance, an assertion of some degree of intellectual autonomy from totalitarian control.

The resilience of science and of scientific communities is striking.

³⁴ B. Barnes, D. Bloor, and J. Henry, *Scientific Knowledge: A Sociological Analysis* (London: Athlone Press, 1996), 114–15.

³⁵ See in particular L.R. Graham’s *What Have We Learned about Science and Technology from the Russian Experience?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

³⁶ See, for example, Kojevnikov, *Stalin’s Great Science*, and N. Krementsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

Totalitarian rule was based on terror, and it put individuals and groups under enormous stress. Scientists were helped by the fact that the Nazi and Stalinist regimes needed science; nevertheless, they suffered greatly from the repressive policies of the two regimes and more specifically in the Soviet case from the Party's claim to authority in matters of scientific knowledge. In view of the resilience of science under Nazism and Stalinism, it is appropriate to ask what was Nazi about Nazi science and what was Stalinist about Stalinist science. The commonest response to these questions is to point to the racism and cruelty of medical science in Nazi Germany and the ruthlessly ambitious "big science" character of science under Stalin, especially after 1945. After World War II the victorious powers were eager to recruit, and even seize, those German scientists and engineers who could be useful to them. In other words, for all the differences between totalitarianism and democracy, the scientific knowledge produced in those two types of society was mutually comprehensible and compatible. This is not to deny that Nazi or Stalinist society and ideology may have helped to shape scientific knowledge (itself an important topic) but it does not appear to have done so to the point of producing results that were mutually unintelligible, at least in the well-established disciplines.

Conclusion

In the 1930s some British scientists were inspired by the Soviet experience to call for the planning of science so that it could be directed toward serving the needs of society. J.D. Bernal was the most influential proponent of this view, which he expounded in his 1939 book *The Social Function of Science*.³⁷ This idea won widespread support, but it also aroused opposition. Michael Polanyi, a distinguished physical chemist and philosopher, who had fled to Britain from Germany when the Nazis took power, set up the Society for Freedom in Science in 1940 to promote the conception of science as free enquiry and to combat

³⁷ J.D. Bernal, *The Social Function of Science* (New York: Macmillan, 1939).

Bernal's view that science should exist primarily for the benefit of society.³⁸

During the Cold War the Lysenko affair received a good deal of attention in the West as an egregious example of political interference in science. There was of course a propaganda motive for this, as Western governments sought to discredit the claim that science flourished in the Soviet Union. But there were broader issues at stake, to do with the role of the state and planning in science. In that respect, Bernal's argument about the social function of science emerged victorious. The idea that science should serve society came to be very widely accepted.

Since the end of the Cold War there has been a greater readiness to see that science, for all the vicissitudes it suffered, did well under Nazism and Stalinism. The picture is much more complex than a focus on the Lysenko affair alone would lead one to expect: science prospered; scientists were beneficiaries of totalitarian rule as well as its victims; their actions ranged from courageous resistance to conformism to opportunistic exploitation of official ideologies; science was shaped by those societies, but not usually in ways that cut it off intellectually from the directions of scientific research elsewhere.

Even if science prospered under totalitarianism, we should not move too readily from the belief that science and totalitarianism are incompatible to the belief that science will flourish irrespective of its societal context. As Merton pointed out in his 1942 paper, "the most diverse social structures have provided some measure of support to science."³⁹ He also noted, however, that the association between science and social structure was not random, that some social structures were more conducive than others to the development of science (something he saw as a good thing).

The fact that some aspects of science thrived under Nazism and Stalinism should not be taken as an endorsement of totalitarianism. It might rather be seen as an indictment of the view that science is

³⁸ M. Polanyi, *The Contempt of Freedom: the Russian experiment and after* (London: Watts, 1940).

³⁹ Merton, "The Normative Structure of Science," 269.

a civilizing force, that science in itself embodies humane values. In that sense, it might be argued, the association with totalitarianism did great harm to science. As Hubert Markl, president of the Max Planck Society (successor to the Kaiser Wilhelm Society) said in a 2001 speech, when reflecting on the lessons to be drawn from the role of biomedical science in Nazi Germany: “we have to be aware that every realm of science has to have its moral bounds.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ H. Markl, “Speech Given at the Opening of a Symposium on ‘Biomedical Sciences and Human Experimentation at Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes—the Auschwitz Connection,’” in *Medicine and Medical Ethics in Nazi Germany*, ed. F.R. Nicosia and J. Huener (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 136.

From Fascism to Communism

The History of a Conversion

MARIA TERESA GIUSTI

A Blackshirt's conversion to communism is the subject of these pages, which aim to follow the personal and political fate of Danilo Ferretti, a restless spirit of fascist Italy. Intensely antibourgeois and anticapitalist, Ferretti pursued politics as revolution, and wanted to build totalitarian popular democracy. His choice to turn his back on fascism and favor the opposite camp, communism, was determined by the time World War II broke out. This reversal was not as unusual as one might think. Many other young fascists found themselves at a crossroads after July 25, 1943, and particularly after the end of the war. Their decisions often diverged. Some remained faithful to fascism, and in 1946 became members of the neo-fascist party (the Italian Socialist Movement; MSI). Others joined the monarchic party, or the Christian Democracy (DC). Finally, many felt it was more consistent with their past to enroll in the political and union organizations of the left, including the Italian Communist Party (PCI), where they sometimes took on important positions.¹

Danilo Ferretti's story holds special interest for the ways in which his political conversion occurred. He participated in the Spanish Civil War enlisting as a volunteer in the fascist army, and during the Second

¹ On the neo-fascist option, see G. Parlato, *Fascisti senza Mussolini. Le origini del neofascismo in Italia 1943–1948* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006). On the fate of young fascists, see the long and detailed study by A. Carloti, *Gli orfani di Salò. Il Sessantotto nero dei giovani neofascisti nel dopoguerra. 1945–1951* (Milan: Mursia, 2008), and, by the same author, *I ragazzi della fiamma* (Milan: Mursia, 2011). As concerns the fate of fascist unionism, see, among others, P. Neglie, *Fratelli in camicia nera. Comunisti e fascisti dal corporativismo alla CGIL. 1928–1948* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996).

World War fought in Yugoslavia and in Russia in the fascist militia. It was precisely in the Soviet Union, during his captivity, that he resolved to convert to communism.

The Adherence to Fascism

Danilo Ferretti was born in the Italian town of Russi, in the Province of Ravenna, on January 14, 1913.² He became involved with the first fascist organizations in 1931, when, after graduating from the classical lyceum, he enrolled in medical school at the University of Bologna, and—“like everyone else,” he writes—was forced to secure membership of a fascist university group (GUF).³

In subsequent years, his adherence to fascism strengthened, finally becoming the result of personal, firmly held convictions. According to his autobiography, what moved him at first was neither the education he received at home (his father was “very much opposed to fascism,” and disapproved of his decision to join the Blackshirts during his pre-military service in 1933), nor ideological belief. As in the case of many of his friends, it was merely the circumstances that inspired him: “All the young people in my town were doing as I was,” and, further, “I did not realize the import of this fact.”⁴

The definite change in his attitude occurred in 1933. His family’s financial straits, and the need for him to support himself through his studies, compelled him to teach Italian and Latin as a substitute teacher in the professional training schools of Russi and in the technical institute of Ravenna. On December 5, in his capacity as a teacher, he was invited to commemorate Giovan Battista Perasso, the Genoese hero known as Balilla. “I accepted,” he writes, “perhaps also because

² As stated in his autobiography, his father and mother—a varnisher and a seamstress, respectively—“managed, at great sacrifice, to see him through a complete course of high school education”; *Autobiography of Danilo Ferretti* (henceforth *Autobiography*), 1. His widow, Maria Chiara Bosi Ferretti, kindly provided the author of this essay with the typewritten text from 1949.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

my ambition was aroused. That was my first true step in political life.”⁵ Later, his desire to take active part in politics prompted him to change his course of studies and enroll in law school. His financial troubles and his work as a substitute teacher had made it impossible for him to attend classes in medical school regularly; what’s more, he trusted that a degree in law, rather than medicine, would facilitate his entry into one of the regime’s institutions. Thus, he became politically active in the small town of Russi, and “almost unwittingly, the black shirt became not only an item of clothing, but also a frame of mind, which seemed well suited to the confused, socialist-leaning ideas I had always harbored.”⁶

What won Ferretti over was fascism’s revolutionary promise. Increasingly, Mussolini’s regime seemed to him the only political force capable of deeply changing society, as had happened in Russia in 1917, and the only force that could produce true revolution based on social justice, a recurrent theme in his thoughts and writings. This stance was shared by many intellectuals of the time, including those of the so-called fascist left. While never formally adhering to the latter, Ferretti did share some of its core values and attitudes, absent from or little developed in other currents of fascism: “the fight against the bourgeoisie and capitalism, but also the aversion to liberalism, the subordination of economy to politics, the populism, culture as civil and social commitment.”⁷

Throughout the 1930s, Ferretti was an uncompromising fascist. He held the firm belief that fascism could bring about great social change, and set off a process leading to corporative civilization, social equality, and the end of the corrupt bourgeois world. Like other young adults involved in the GUF and in the local federations of the National Fascist Party (PNF), who even contributed to youth magazines, particularly to those linked with *Il Bargello* and *L’Universale*, Ferretti

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁷ P. Buchignani, “Romano Bilenchi dal fascismo al comunismo,” *Nuova storia contemporanea* 6 (2009): 62. On the fascist left, the most rebellious of the many fascist currents, see G. Parlato, *La sinistra fascista. Storia di un progetto mancato* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), which identifies that movement’s characteristic features between the 1920s and the 1970s.

shared fascism's anti-bourgeois spirit and approved of the points of contact between Blackshirt Italy and the Soviet Union. Chicago was the "enemy," not Moscow. The latter had broken free of traditional forces, which were outdated and corrupt, thus setting an example for others to follow.⁸

In 1935, Danilo was called on to attend a course for infantry reserve officer cadets. Meanwhile, the war was being fought in Ethiopia, an operation that had his approval. He later explained that "the regime's propaganda against the great Anglo-Saxon plutocracies," which embodied the corrupt and imperialist bourgeois world, had particularly taken hold on him.⁹

Ferretti's participation in the regime's political life was bound to take place through authentic militancy, and by putting fascism's militaristic "warrior spirit" into practice. This occurred in Spain when, in 1938, he was awarded a GUF scholarship to study at the University of Santander. Here, he mixed with student circles, where "Franco's cause was a holy cause." He later shared his thoughts on this matter:

Superficial and empty like so many young people in my condition, my head full of fascist propaganda, I believed I could equate the small number of monarchic, bigoted and greedy people that made up the bourgeoisie with the entire Spanish population. And that provided me with a moral justification to enlist in the units of the Italian army that fought against Spanish republicans. I said it provided me with a justification, not with a reason, for the real motive for my enlisting must be sought 1) in my need for a "warrior title" in order to secure a position in Italy, and 2) in my need to pay off the many debts my parents had contracted with banks and individuals, mostly to support me in my studies.¹⁰

In this passage from 1949, the author's tendency to reconsider his adherence to fascism in the light of his subsequent antifascist turn is apparent, as is his minimization of the ideal reasons that had first inspired him, much more prominently displayed in other sections of

⁸ *Autobiography*, 62.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

his *Autobiography*. Still, on October 26, 1938, instead of returning to Italy, he joined the Italian troops that were fighting in Spain as a reserve lieutenant.¹¹ He would remain in Spain until April 1939, when he filed a request to return to Italy after arguing with his battalion commander, whose “plundering methods” he disapproved. By his own account, it was in Spain that he was first confronted with the regime’s violent nature. Perhaps also to absolve himself, he would later point out that he never took part in “feats of arms of any kind” in that war.¹²

Back in Italy, Ferretti devoted himself completely to his studies, graduating in November 1939. He then found a job with the artisan federation in Rome, where he first came in contact with what he would term the “corrupt world of fascism”:

My monthly salary was 1,500 lire. It wasn’t a lot, but the job entailed many chances for and the likelihood of improvement. I kept it until 15 June 1940. During this time, I saw that corruption had seeped through all the institutions of the fascist regime. It disgusted me. Therefore, I welcomed the new call to arms by the 28th infantry regiment on 15 June. I was assigned to the GIL battalions (which were to carry out the so-called youth march), with which I remained until 26 November 1940, when I was discharged.¹³

At this point, Danilo could have resumed work in Rome, and spent time with his family, resting before he was inevitably called back to arms. Yet in Rome he felt as if he were “drowning in a sea of venal, immoral, and apathetic bureaucrats,” whereas in his own town he perceived himself as being surrounded by the “usual shirkers, sons of the draft-dodgers from the other war, and ‘heroes’ of the squads, profiteers and speculators.” He wrote, “I immediately felt ill at ease. Leave . . . I must leave, and return after the war was over with the right to speak my mind and clear Italian life of all the corruption that had invaded it.”¹⁴

Thus, Ferretti wanted to escape an environment he saw as corrupt. Furthermore, and above all else, the war had rekindled his affection for

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 3.

¹³ Ibid. The acronym GIL stands for Italian Youth of the Lictor.

¹⁴ Ibid.

fascism, which was also the case with many other young adults of the time. The conflict, viewed as a revolutionary war, seemed to provide the regime with a chance to redeem itself, while offering youth hope for real renewal. In mid-December 1940, Ferretti decided to enlist as a volunteer in the fascist militia, which he had not wanted to be involved in until then. Assigned to the 81st Blackshirt battalion of the Ravenna division, in the spring of 1941 he left for Slovenia, which by the end of the Yugoslav campaign was under Italian management. Italian occupation troops had great difficulty managing the territory they were assigned, and were involved in a violent civil war among resistance forces (communist partisans, the Ustashe, and Chetniks), which they were unable to contain, if not by means of equal violence.

Ferretti later recounted that he had been disgusted by the experience: he did not accept conducting the war from house to house, and asked to be assigned to a different unit and location.¹⁵ Nevertheless, he remained a staunch fascist, and was intent on getting his “warrior title,” which would allow him to secure a job and fully to participate in his country’s social and political life, once back in Italy. He was assigned, at the helm of a small group of soldiers, to the 6th Blackshirt battalion of the Montebello division, one of the units most loyal to Mussolini, and a part of the ARMIR set to leave for the Russian front, which it reached on 11 September 1942.

The battalion arrived behind the front lines at the Don, where General Diamanti awaited it. Despite the commander’s assurances that the war would be short-lived, the newcomers immediately realized that was not going to be the case. The following words are from Ferretti’s journal: “How did the Russians’ aggressiveness, the losses suffered by Italian units, the sense of tiredness felt by older CSIR soldiers, the ‘void,’ and everything else we were experiencing reconcile with the leisurely stroll they’d told us we were going to take on leaving Italy? . . . Many of us started fearing [or rather, thinking] that the patent leather

¹⁵ Ibid., 4; *Verbale del dibattimento di Danilo Ferretti al processo D’Onofrio del 31 maggio 1939* [Transcript of Danilo Ferretti’s hearing at the D’Onofrio trial of 31 May 1939], given to his widow, Maria Chiara Bosi Ferretti, 1, and the interview with the latter by the author of the present essay, Bologna, May 20, 2010.

boots and brand new uniforms they'd forced us to buy to 'parade in Moscow' would remain in their cases for a long time to come."¹⁶

Like many sincere fascists, he felt betrayed by the slapdash way in which Mussolini had sent many young men to their deaths on the Russian front, unequipped not only with modern weapons, but also with adequate clothing, and following vague logistics. For instance, they lacked antifreeze liquid, an absolute necessity in Russian weather, and so the oil used to operate trucks had to be heated before their engines could be turned on, which posed a serious fire hazard. Ferretti recounts an episode regarding these ordinary difficulties faced in the dead of winter:

Our truck was trailing at the end of the line. It had just tottered down and up the slope of a deep hollow, when the engine stopped. It was a tragedy, under the circumstances, all the more so given that the truck was carrying dispatch riders, explorers, signalmen, and soldiers—their faces gaunt and pale—who had just arrived from Italy a few days before. The driver lifted the hood and started tweaking the engine. . . .

I was nervous, my soul heavy; deep down, I had a dirty conscience. I had lost all belief in the war we were fighting, and yet, in spite of myself, I was still so imbued with rhetoric that I did not want to pull out of a test that was clearly very difficult, and possibly fatal. More than half an hour passed. We could no longer hope to reach the column. What were we to do now? Continue on foot? And where to? Go back on foot? And where to?

"Should I try to start the engine one more time?" the driver asked.

"Try," I answered. He stood in front of the radiator, and using all his strength he proceeded to turn the crank, which was very hard. Combustion took place once, then twice, and finally the engine started.

We resumed our journey, following what appeared to be a track in the icy snow. After a few hundred meters, we reached the end of the

¹⁶ D. Ferretti, *The Long Road of a Prisoner of War in the USSR*, typewritten journal, kindly provided by Maria Chiara Bosi Ferretti, entry dated September 22, 1942. Ferretti published two collections of short stories on his life in Romagna and, to a lesser extent, on his experiences during the Russian campaign, which are the main subject of his diary: D. Ferretti, *Una Romagna così* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1975) and *I giorni e gli anni* (Ravenna: Il Girasole, 1979). Both volumes contain more than just chronicles and sketches of town life; they impress the reader's mind with a sense of anticipation and preparation for the war and the real points of reference in the author's life, the Battle of Golevka and the retreat, both of which preluded his political conversion.

column, which had also stopped, because the trucks at the front had broken down.

If people hadn't been dying—and even when they weren't really dying, the cold was agonizing—we might have appreciated the humorous side of war.¹⁷

Ferretti's unit was supposed to regain control over a stronghold near Golevka, in the region of Belgorod, secured by the Italians and subsequently taken over by the Russians. Even to the most committed fascists, such as himself, this feat seemed impossible, and, more importantly, useless. Ferretti criticized his commanders' behavior without reticence, and reported on a series of imprecise and confused orders, because of which, "in the course of a week, entire battalions were sacrificed" to no avail.¹⁸ "Our soldiers were in wretched conditions—they hadn't been equipped to endure the Russian winter, and lacked proper weapons. All the fighters were demoralized and physically ill. In effect, there was not a single command, for the generals in charge of the troops had left."¹⁹ It was the first wounded, amassed in the camp hospital of Golevka, and other people, who "seemed to have lost their minds," that revealed the truth of the war to Ferretti: "There should have been a doctor, or at least a post for the treatment of the injured and sick. There was nothing. Officers would emerge from their shelters and gather around those who had been hurt. They too appeared under a spell of insanity. They would gesture like madmen and shout: 'A doctor! A doctor! Where's a doctor? You're all cowards!'" Meanwhile, the injured blasphemed and packed their wounds as best they could with the medication packets."²⁰ Confronted with death, he was made to consider the absurdity of war:

All of a sudden the air exploded, and the cataracts opened: antitank guns, mortars, and machine guns were fired, and men were covered in death. This is all I remember about that hell. Before me, maybe a hundred meters away, stands a young man from Cremona, Farina, former student of the school of fascist mysticism, presently machine gunner

¹⁷ Ferretti, *I giorni e gli anni*, 172–73.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, and *Verbale del dibattimento di Danilo Ferretti al processo D'Onofrio*, I.

¹⁹ *Verbale del dibattimento di Danilo Ferretti al processo D'Onofrio*, I.

²⁰ Ferretti, *I giorni e gli anni*, 175.

lieutenant. He's long-legged, and moves forward in short, quick leaps. He's in the line of fire. He seems to be dragging himself toward a man who's lying on the ground, his heavy weapon upside down, and to be shaking him. I see him stand up, and I can make out his reddish beard. He screams, I think. He's so tall . . . He falls with a crash, shot in the head. . . . There are dead men standing, killed and stiffened by the cold.²¹

For Ferretti's unit, the battle of Golevka marked the beginning of the retreat, which involved all the units stationed along the Don. The defeat suffered in the winter of 1942–43 dealt a serious blow to the Axis armies, and determined a crisis in Ferretti's political identity.

The terrible defeat suffered by the Italian forces, the incompetence and cowardice shown by high officers during the retreat, particularly those on the active list, and the useless sacrifice of thousands of young men left a deep impression on my heart. Though I didn't exactly identify the causes of all these disasters, I started thinking that the blame did not lie with a few men, but with the entire system.

And so the whole house of cards I'd believed in for years and for which I'd even made sacrifices came crumbling down.

However, at that point I was still simply disoriented.²²

Imprisonment and Antifascist Propaganda

On December 22, 1942, the Red Army captured Ferretti and his whole unit. Thus began the march toward the train station from which the prisoners would be sent off to the camps. "Our physical conditions at the time of our capture were pitiful. We had been fighting out in the cold for days, eating when we could."²³ On January 1, 1943, the prisoners started their journey aboard a train with livestock cars. Some of them, debilitated because of the battles and marches, died of dysentery during the trip. Ten days into the journey, the convoy reached camp 52, where prisoners who had contracted dysentery were detained.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

²² *Autobiography*, 5.

²³ *Verbale del dibattimento di Danilo Ferretti al processo D'Onofrio*, 1.

Everyone else, including Ferretti, continued on to the camp of Oranki (74), which they reached only on January 26.²⁴

As with Ferretti's account of his adherence to fascism, the narrative he provides of the captivity is heavily affected by his subsequent espousing of communism, and by the ensuing tendency to validate the party's version of the facts. This bias is easy to detect when his accounts are contrasted with all that has come to light thanks to later historical reconstructions. For example, Ferretti refers that the food doled out to prisoners was enough for them to live on.²⁵ In fact, at first, the lack of food, due both to disorganization and to a form of negligence on the part of the Soviets, resulted in very high mortality among prisoners of war, particularly Italian ones. Charts documenting mortality among prisoners, which the Russian government only made available in the early 1990s, belie Ferretti's positive impressions.²⁶

Soon after their arrival at the camp of Oranki, an Italian political instructor met the prisoners. He "offered words of encouragement and assured us that he would help us to the extent possible."²⁷ Antifascist propaganda among prisoners was immediately set in motion. The instructor started interrogating prisoners to acquire information on their political leanings. He gathered information on their families, on the work and properties of their parents, and on their cultural interests. These interrogations, repeated throughout the captivity, were used to paint a picture of each prisoner and fill out a sort of information form, the *anketa*, which would end up in each prisoner's personal file.²⁸

In the course of the questionings, Ferretti did not hesitate to declare himself a fascist, and to claim, even though by then he was aware that

²⁴ In Oranki, Ferretti met lieutenant Enrico Reginato, a doctor in the camp hospital, and captain Joli, who served as a nurse (see *Verbale del dibattimento di Danilo Ferretti al processo D'Onofrio*, 3). Both would always oppose anti-fascist propaganda; the Russians accused them of crimes of war, and so they were repatriated only in 1952.

²⁵ See *ibid.*, 4.

²⁶ On the matter of mortality, please refer to M.T. Giusti, *I prigionieri italiani in Russia*, 2nd ed. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014), 109–17; for the charts, see *ibid.*, 126, 130–33.

²⁷ *Verbale del dibattimento di Danilo Ferretti al processo D'Onofrio*, 4.

²⁸ The *anketa* had twenty-five questions (later increased to forty) that as well as eliciting the prisoner's personal data, his rank, and his unit, aimed to trace his political identity (for an example, see Giusti, *I prigionieri italiani in Russia*, 340–41).

the opposite was true, that Italy should have won the war.²⁹ Toward the end of February, he came down with typhus. An odyssey started for him then, when in addition to typhus he became infected with tuberculosis, a disease that would plague him for the rest of his life.

Recovered from typhus but completely debilitated, Danilo was released from the camp hospital in May 1943. At the end of the month, a medical commission placed him in the lowest of the three categories prisoners were divided into based on their health. For this reason, Ferretti was excused from work, which all prisoners except officers were forced to carry out, and sent to the hospital in Skit, near Oranki. Here too political commissioners visited prisoners, in spite of the fact that the latter were sick or very weak, and even in extreme conditions continued to conduct political propaganda.³⁰

In addition to the disillusionment with the war, addressed above, the Marxist-Leninist antifascist propaganda Ferretti was exposed to played a decisive role in his conversion to communism.

Responsibility for managing prisoners of war fell on a large number of administrative, military, and political offices, particularly of the NKVD, the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Within the latter, it was the Main Administration for Affairs of Prisoners of War and Internees (GUPVI) that managed prisoners. The NKVD was supported in its political propaganda activities by the Central Committee's Department for Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop), as well as by communists in exile in the USSR. These people interrogated prisoners to find out their political inclinations, organized meetings, and held rallies in the camps on antifascism, communism, and the military successes of the Red Army.

Propaganda activities had both short-term and long-term goals. In the short term, they aimed to convince prisoners to sign pleas that would be circulated among fighting troops in order to convince them

²⁹ See *Verbale del dibattimento di Danilo Ferretti al processo D'Onofrio*, 5.

³⁰ According to a report by Vincenzo Bianco, several political instructors contracted typhus in the camps, and some even died as a result (see *Pismo Bianco italianskim komunistam instruktoram lagerei* [Bianco's letter to Italian communists, instructors in the camps], Secret, Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History [RGASPI], f. 495, op. 77, d. 27, l. 50, in Giusti, *I prigionieri italiani in Russia*, 156, 169).

to desist from acts of war against the Soviet Union, and to surrender to the Red Army. But as the situation on the front started evolving in the USSR's favor, propaganda among prisoners of war was perfected into a more complex indoctrination. Thus, in the long term, the goal of propaganda, as stated by the Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, was "to forge conscious and active antifascists, prepare new national military units, and also new cadres for their respective communist movements."³¹ As well as fighting against fascism, propaganda aimed to offer a positive image of the Soviet Union, born from the revolution "to create a regime that may not only destroy the causes of war, but also allow workers themselves to lead the state and build their life . . . without capitalists or Blackshirts."³²

Indeed, propaganda's most ambitious objective was to shape the "new man" of socialism among prisoners, as well as in Soviet society. The reeducation of prisoners was not merely a matter of creating trustworthy collaborators. It was linked with the eschatological function of Marxism-Leninism, too. The Soviet leadership organized antifascist propaganda activities with the intention of reeducating masses "deviated" by fascist ideology. Fundamentally, these activities fell within the scope of communism's penchant for education. The whole of the Soviet Union was viewed as a huge classroom in which everyone needed to be taught lessons that would allow for capitalism to be rooted out, and for the spirit of socialism to be planted in its place. Through the system established by the political direction and the Comintern, subjects "in need of correction" were to experience a catharsis. This would affect not only their human and social sphere, but would also shape them on a transnatural plane.

Subjects were led to "suppress their old selves to be made new." The attempt to conduct this kind of program among prisoners of war, as well as among Soviet civilian deportees,³³ stemmed from the regime's

³¹ *Postanovlenie Sekretariata IKKI ot 5-ogo fevraliia 1943* [Resolution of the Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, 5 February 1943], Secret, RGASPI, f. 495, op. 77, d. 26, l. 24.

³² *Bianco's letter to Italian communists, instructors in the camps*, 50.

³³ On the educational purposes of the Gulag for Soviet civilians, refer to the rich literature and historiography on the subject. Particularly, see E. Bacon, *The Gulag at War*:

determination to educate men hailing from other countries to such a principle of rebirth, so that they might transfer their newfound convictions and experiences back to their homelands. To be sure, the circumstances provided the regime with the unique chance to expose a large number of foreign nationals to its belief system.

The Conversion to Communism

This form of education had a particularly strong effect on Ferretti, and ultimately led him to a complete transition from fascism to communism. He recounts his conversion both in his *Autobiography* and in his journal, *The Long Road of a Prisoner of War in the USSR*, which to this day remains unpublished. The latter text is a confession of sorts, a tool of “redemption” Danilo used to reinterpret his whole past in the light of his conversion. It is not by chance that Danilo Ferretti chose the narrative form of the journal to tell the tale of his transition from militant fascism to communism. A diary was the best device the author could use to reveal his new personality, blotting out his past and making himself out to be a model communist. According to the narrative of the diary, there was a turning point in his life, which separated his youth, before the war in Russia, from the period that followed the war, his captivity, and, more importantly, his contact with antifascist propaganda.

Because it was not written at the same time as the events it described, the journal—an instrument for the elaboration of memory—allowed

Stalin's Forced Labor System in the Light of the Archives (New York: New York University Press, 1994); O. Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag: From Collectivization to the Great Terror* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004). However, it must be clarified that, according to some historians, the Bolsheviks had given up on the idea of converting detainees, and that the educational spirit of communism within the Soviet empire stopped at the threshold of the camps (see A. Besançon, *A Century of Horrors: Communism, Nazism, and the Uniqueness of the Shoah* [Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007]). On the limits of the Gulag's educational set-up, see A. Kaminski, *Konzentrationslager 1896 bis heute: Geschichte, Funktion, Typologie* (Munich: Piper, 1990), and G.M. Ivanova, *Labor Camp Socialism: The Gulag in the Soviet Totalitarian System* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 19.

the author to expunge from his recollection of the past any “troublesome” aspect at odds with his decision to espouse communism. Ferretti’s diary, written after his experience in the camps, is an extraordinary source of information recording the effects propaganda had on him. His reworking of his past experiences reveals a new social individual, a “being” willing to deny itself, to change and accept everything from the new regime. In the pages of his diary, he manages to “release [his] poisonous thoughts and thereby regain the assured and unified voice of a devoted revolutionary.”³⁴

On leaving the hospital in Skit, Ferretti was returned to the camp of Oranki, where political activities were well under way. Among many such activities were the readings suggested by the instructors, the works of Lenin, Stalin, Marx, and Engels, translated in the languages spoken by the prisoners. “I had an unquenchable thirst. I pored over those books, reading and studying them without repose. Gradually, I seemed to gain greater insight into my past, to see more precisely the reasons for fascism, the causes of our tragedy. Bit by bit, I felt reason inexorably sever even the last of the sentimental ties that kept me anchored to the past.”³⁵ News of the fall of the fascist regime pushed him to increase his involvement in political activities:

During the first few months of my imprisonment, I was spending my time thus [deep in study]. Then, on 25 July [1943], came the Badoglio government and its “War goes on.” I immediately understood that the time for action had come even for Italians who were far away from their homeland, and that even in concentration camps spirits had to be mobilized to fight against Germans and overcome fascism.

³⁴ J. Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2. Hellbeck addresses how—in totalitarian regimes, and particularly in the Soviet one—diaries were the tools authors used to reconstruct their adaptation to the regime. In his essay, Hellbeck claims he was surprised at the realization that diaries and memoirs proliferated under Stalin: “given the omnipresence of state repression in totalitarian systems, only exceptional persons risk keeping secret diaries” (3). In fact, by describing the process whereby their authors adapted to the regime, diaries were means of self-legitimation.

³⁵ *Autobiography*, 4.

It was then that, under the guidance of Italian and Russian instructors, I started openly carrying out political work, which has not ended with my repatriation.³⁶

The “transformation” was not pain-free. “On the contrary, deep down my pain was great,” he confessed in his *Autobiography*, “my mind and my heart were at odds.”³⁷ In this process of change, he was guided and counseled by Ettore Fiammenghi, a communist exile who served as instructor for the Italians in Oranki. Fiammenghi was one of the exiles most criticized by the prisoners, because of his morally aggressive behavior toward them and because of his open condemnation of fascism, which not all prisoners were ready or willing to accept. Conversely, Ferretti appreciated his antifascist choice, which had forced him to emigrate, and which separated him from the many officers who reacted to the regime only after its collapse:

In February, more than once I heard the “political commissioner” Fiammenghi speak about the Italian situation after Stalingrad and the African upheavals to Italian officers gathered in assembly. Hearing him call Mussolini “the rogue (or the fool) of Predappio” made me feel like a boxer who had to roll with the punches keeping a straight face. Yet even then I started noticing that those invectives (Fiammenghi called them “classifications”), while they displeased me, did not sound as jarring or as stilted to me as the more formally polished and restrained ones uttered by some high officers who declared themselves antifascist right after their capture. Fiammenghi’s tirade came from a man who had always fought against fascism, preferring a state of conflict, poverty and exile to compromise and a peaceful life. If we hadn’t heard his voice before, it wasn’t because he’d kept quiet. On the other hand, these high officers had always been silent. The young, born and raised under fascist rule, had seen them beaming at ceremonies, parades, and regime parties. And now these men cast aspersions on Mussolini. How could you help equating them with the representatives of ruling elites, whose opposition to fascism appeared to be, above all else, a matter of competition?³⁸

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ferretti, *The Long Road of a Prisoner of War in the USSR*, 86–87.

Ferretti found “the fundamental reason for detaching himself from fascism” in his conversations with the political instructors of the camps, as well as in his innate aspiration to “social justice.” In his case, the conversion to communism was gradual, thought-out, and whole-hearted: “And it mattered that the victory of communism came for me not as an instance of love at first sight, but as the culmination of a gradual crumbling down, resulting from critical thought, of all the elements that constituted fascism.”³⁹

The construction of a society characterized by harmony between the classes as first planned by Mussolini—where trade and professional associations might share decisions on the social and economic policies of the country, taking the place of political representation—was among the elements of fascism that Ferretti perceived to be crumbling down. After the fascist experiment failed, Ferretti decided to seek alternative projects and contents elsewhere. Regarding the communist exiles, who “were the living opposition to fascism,” he wrote the following words: “Fiammenghi, D’Onofrio, Gottardi, Robotti, Di Giovanni, Curato, Germanetto . . . An unknown Italy approached me with a language that perhaps hurt me, but that I felt was based on the truth, a language that differed from anything I’d heard until then, but seemed to me full of the greatest substance, humanity and Italian character. They were the first antifascist fighters I met.”⁴⁰

For Ferretti, communist ideology was a revelation that called into question the entire political past he had believed in until then. In communism he saw the opportunity to improve himself and Italian society. What’s more, because almost all camps featured schools for the illiterate to complete their general political work, he regarded propaganda as a means of emancipation for the many prisoners who did not know how to read or write. Toward the end of October 1944, Ferretti asked for permission to attend the antifascist school for prisoners of war of Krasnogorsk, set up in camp 27, near Moscow. Here, among other things, he studied Marxist political economy, dialectical materialism, and historical materialism.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 96. Between January 1942 and the spring of 1943, the political office of the Red Army and the Comintern instituted two anti-fascist schools for the political education

The course syllabus included Italian history (from Napoleonic rule to the present, with special attention to the last three decades), political economy (with special attention to the time of imperialism), the basics of historical materialism, and the basics of economic geography.

There were more or less seventy students, divided into three study groups, one of them made up of soldiers only, and the other two made up of both soldiers and officers. Generally, before reaching camp 27/2, soldiers attended a preparatory course in camp 165.

The actual lessons were held in the morning with all three groups in attendance, and they usually lasted two hours, with a short break in between, during which students could rest or step outside to smoke a cigarette. Teachers made their presentation, and students took notes. At the end of the class, teachers answered any questions the students might have.

In the afternoon, there were a study hall and a seminar—that is, a discussion among the students on the topics of the previous lessons, under the supervision of a teacher, who, at the end, drew the conclusions.

In the evening, an optional study hall was offered.⁴²

Regarding his experience at Krasnogorsk, Ferretti noted: “My status as a prisoner of war was unchanged, but at least I found myself in an environment that satisfied my great desire to fill the void fascism had created in my mind, and update my political and cultural knowledge with a view to returning to a renovated Italy, which appeared under way thanks to the liberation fight. Up until then, all I’d done was devour book after book, without following a defined course of studies.”⁴³

In his opinion, school was the means to the political and cultural training he needed to become a leading figure in a new, democratic Italy. Surely, the camp was not a place of recreation. In addition to studying, prisoners had to work to provide for all the needs of the

of prisoners of war: one in camp 165, in Yuzha, near the city of Ivanovo (300 km from Moscow); the other in camp 27, in Krasnogorsk. The courses held in the first school were of a lower level, whereas those offered in camp 27 constituted something like a high school for the most deserving and motivated students (on this issue, please see N. Tereščenko, *L'uomo che “torturò” i prigionieri di guerra italiani* (Milan: Vangelista, 1994), 133, and Giusti, *I prigionieri italiani in Russia*, 170f.

⁴² Ferretti, *The Long Road of a Prisoner of War in the USSR*, 98.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 96–97.

camp. For instance, they had to cut wood and carry it on their backs to where it would be used to heat up the classrooms and dorms, and to cook.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, compared to prisoners who refused communist propaganda, those who attended antifascist schools were treated with a certain degree of respect. At Krasnogorsk, Ferretti distinguished himself for his interest in the teachings of Marxism-Leninism. He was therefore chosen to be the instructors' assistant, and was made into an instructor himself, so he could impart lessons to his fellow countrymen.

At the end of the course, students had to take an oath, pledging to pursue the antifascist cause. The final part of the oath explains the responsibilities entailed by the promise: "With this oath, I am bound to all antifascists in ties of fraternal loyalty and devotion to the fight until complete victory of the holy cause. I vow to be ruthless with those who break this oath. If I break this oath, and become a traitor of the people, of my homeland and of my family, I will lose the right to live. My comrades in the common cause will be authorized to eliminate me as a traitor and an enemy of the people."⁴⁵

Ferretti had to be admitted to the camp hospital again, and was not able to complete the course. As a result, he never took this oath. Yet he later said that, if he'd been given the chance, he would have.⁴⁶

During his detention, he continued to carry out propaganda among sick soldiers even as he was hospitalized for tuberculosis. His journal documents his surprise at finding out how many Italian soldiers were illiterate, and how politically uneducated they were, even on fascism.

When I first got here [at the hospital in Oranki] from the antifascist school—where my classmates were soldiers who, starting from nothing, had acquired a remarkable culture during their time in prison—I was baffled. I felt terribly uncomfortable. I would say, "I can't endure this!" Now I've gotten used to the situation. And, even if just slightly, someone has changed, particularly two illiterate soldiers, humble young men who listen to what you tell them.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 98.

⁴⁵ Most secret, RGASPI, f. 495, op. 77, d. 20, l. 126. The oath is given in full in Giusti, *I prigionieri italiani in Russia*, 176.

⁴⁶ *Verbale del dibattito di Danilo Ferretti al processo D'Onofrio*, 14.

It's easy to guess their political ideas: a chaotic jumble. In Italy, they never knew what politics was. They were farmers. And apparently they had very little land. . . . They hold peculiar views as to the needs of workers; these do not include study, rest, the theater, the movies, etc. Such activities are for the gentry, not for workers. Instinctively they loathe fascists and fascism, but they don't exactly know what the two are about. They say: It was Mussolini who reduced us to our current state. Why didn't they kill him before 1935?⁴⁷

In addition to working as an instructor, he collaborated with *L'Alba*, the magazine published by Italian prisoners of war in the Soviet Union, which bore the insignia "for a free and independent Italy," and featured articles on democracy, and on the mistakes of fascism and Nazism.⁴⁸

From a certain point of view, Ferretti's case remains an anomaly. On a large scale, antifascist propaganda did not produce the intended effects among prisoners, which goes to show that propaganda was only one of the elements that determined the political evolution of each individual. There were those who were antifascist before attending the schools, and those who adhered to communism only on their return to Italy. There were also those who, in spite of being particularly active in captivity, "defected" once back in their country.⁴⁹ For some the school had been a means of attaining better conditions during imprisonment, whereas others adhered to communism under cover, working for the party while officially remaining in the anticommunist camp.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ferretti, *The Long Road of a Prisoner of War in the USSR*, 3–4.

⁴⁸ The first issue was printed on February 10, 1943, in Moscow, under the direction of Rita Montagnana, Togliatti's wife; after the first four issues, and until August 1944, Edoardo D'Onofrio, and later Luigi Amadesi and Paolo Robotti, edited the magazine. After May 1943, to increase the readership, it was decided to promote the collaboration of the prisoners themselves, who were invited to contribute drawings, articles, and jokes.

⁴⁹ In a letter to Dmitrii Shchevliagin, who had directed the courses for Italian prisoners in the school of Yuzha, dated May 7, 1947, Robotti assessed the results of propaganda and mentioned the names of two former prisoners who, after attending the anti-fascist school, did not become PCI militants once back in Italy (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 128, d. 373, l. 43).

⁵⁰ On this fascinating subject, and on the recruiting of spies, particularly German and Italian ones, in the camps, refer to M.T. Giusti, ed. and trans., "Direttiva del Commissariato del popolo per gli Affari Interni (NKVD) dell'URSS, n. 489 sul reclutamento di agenti tra i prigionieri di guerra" [Resolution of the People's Commissariat for Internal

Most prisoners, however, were completely impervious to communist suggestions. In general, propaganda had no effect on staunch fascists, in spite of the fact that Soviet authorities used every means possible specifically to convert them. Fascists, for the most part, continued to believe the regime had been good for Italy; they did not take a critical attitude of the kind seen in Ferretti's case, and they seldom abandoned the ideas they'd had before leaving for Russia. Propaganda only managed to inflame them.

His collaboration with the Soviets and with communist exiles caused a deep rift between Ferretti and the officers who did not share his antifascist choice. This rift would not be overcome after their return to Italy.

The Return to Italy and the D'Onofrio Trial

Ferretti was repatriated. The long journey by train started on February 12, 1946, and was interrupted by a side trip to Odessa, where prisoners were detained for a few days, so they would regain their strength and return to their country in better shape. Ferretti reached Italy in April.

His wife, Maria, was surprised and overjoyed when she found out by chance that he had not "fallen heroically" in war, as she'd been told at first, but that he was ill in barracks in Milan. "He had tuberculosis. My brother and I left from Russi on a borrowed motorbike to go get him. We found him in a large dormitory, lying on straw on the floor. I had relatives in Milan: supporting him, we took him to their house. We left the motorbike and tried to find a seat on a train to Bologna, a difficult feat, as all trains were full. My brother scuffled with a passenger for a seat."⁵¹

Back home from imprisonment, Ferretti immediately joined the PCI. He did not receive a warm welcome in Russi: of the seventeen men who had left the town for Russia, he was the only one to make it back. "In a sense, it felt as if he was being blamed for surviving. Several local residents even pressed charges against him, claiming he

Affairs (NKVD) of the USSR, no. 489, on the Recruiting of Agents among Prisoners of War], *Ventesimo secolo* 3 (2003): 109–16.

⁵¹ Interview to Danilo Ferretti's widow, Maria Chiara Bosi Ferretti.

was responsible for the death of those who hadn't made it back. This happened because he'd become a communist."⁵²

His fellow townspeople saw his conversion to communism as betrayal, and subjected him to outright ostracism. Bolognese veterans would not invite him to their gatherings and commemorations: they could not forgive him for surviving by collaborating with Soviet communists. In those years, and up to 1953, Ferretti was further forced to move in and out of hospitals to try to cure his tuberculosis. His only joy came from seeing his family members, and particularly from being able to hold his five-year old daughter Laura, born in 1941, and whom he'd never met.⁵³

After a long period of medical treatment, he resumed his activities within the party, working as a teacher in the PCI educational institution bearing the name of Anselmo Marabini, in Bologna.⁵⁴ After all, many former prisoners of war who had submitted to propaganda activities while in the USSR enrolled in the federations of the Communist Party once back in Italy, often holding important positions.⁵⁵

In 1949, three years after his return from Russia, Ferretti was presented with an important opportunity to prove his loyalty to the teachings and principles of communism: the D'Onofrio trial. In April 1948, at the height of the political campaign, the Union of National Veterans of Russia (UNIRR) published a booklet titled *Russia*, in which

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Laura would die at twenty-eight, leaving a daughter behind, Nina, who was raised by her grandparents Danilo and Maria.

⁵⁴ One of the school's teachers was another veteran imprisoned in Russia, Vincenzo Vitello, whom Ferretti had met among the Russian exiles (author's interview to Ezio Antonioni, former president of the Provincial Institute for the Study of the Italian Resistance in Bologna, and a friend of Ferretti's, Bologna, June 13, 2001, and May 20, 2010).

⁵⁵ In the cited letter to Shchevliagin, Robotti emphasized the successes of anti-fascist activities: "Everywhere I've been to throughout Italy I've found our former students. All are all at their places, in the front row." Robotti referred that many of them were on the directive boards of PCI sections and federations; others were active in the union. He concluded that "the work we carried out has proven truly useful, and it will even more so in years to come." See Robotti's letter to Shchevliagin. See also P. Robotti, *Scelto dalla vita* (Rome: Napoleone, 1980), 314.

several officers who had experienced imprisonment accused D'Onofrio, Robotti and other communist exiles in the USSR of mistreating prisoners of war by subjecting them to "exhausting interrogations" and threats.⁵⁶ D'Onofrio, with the PCI's support, charged the officers with libel. He believed the trial would take place on the eve of the election, and that it would provide a great chance for propaganda. In fact, the hearings were held between May and July 1949, in a political climate that had changed a lot since the year before. The trial was closely followed by the press, and ultimately boomeranged on D'Onofrio and the PCI.

Because the trial was not going well, D'Onofrio asked the Soviet ambassador in Rome, Mikhail A. Kostylev, to help him, particularly in discrediting one of the defense's main witnesses, Father Enelio Franzoni, chaplain of the Pasubio infantry division, and a prisoner in the Soviet Union.⁵⁷ Instead of having Italian communists present in the USSR during the war summoned to testify in his favor, as Kostylev advised him to do, D'Onofrio preferred to have Italian prisoners of war who had attended the antifascist schools and whom he trusted called to the stand. Ferretti, officially acknowledged as a person greatly disabled by the war, and who was gravely ill at the time of the hearing (he was led before the court on a stretcher and required frequent breaks during his deposition), was one of the forty-one witnesses called on to testify in D'Onofrio's favor. During the four-hour deposition, speaking with difficulty, Ferretti praised D'Onofrio's behavior toward prisoners. Ferretti stated that, in one of the communist exile's numerous visits to the camp of Oranki, he spoke of his political efforts and of his desire to "support the cause of the Italian people against fascism," and that

⁵⁶ See *Russia*, single issue, edited by UNIRR, 1948, and D'Onofrio's answer in *Contro le calunnie e le falsità* [Against Calumnies and False Imputations], Fondo D'Onofrio, envelope 3639, dossier 22, Fondazione Istituto Gramsci. On the D'Onofrio trial, see G. Sotgiu, *La tragedia dell'ARMIR nelle arringhe di Giuseppe Sotgiu e Mario Paone al processo D'Onofrio* (Milan: Mursia, 2006); E. Aga-Rossi and V. Zaslavsky, *Stalin and Togliatti: Italy and the Origins of the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011), 179–82; Giusti, *I prigionieri italiani in Russia*, 299f.

⁵⁷ Cf. Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky, *Stalin and Togliatti*, 179–80.

“his words were met with approval by almost everyone present, because they were inspired by patriotic feelings.”⁵⁸

His behavior on this occasion is indicative of his inclination and will to believe the arguments set forth by propagandists, even when they were openly at odds with what he himself had experienced. In this regard, his statements on the health of the prisoners are particularly revealing. Between February and March 1943, a typhus epidemic raged in the camp where Ferretti was hospitalized, which resulted in high mortality among the prisoners. In the camp of Oranki, 661 Italian soldiers died, including 327 officers.⁵⁹ In the hospital of Skit, “which mostly housed soldiers sick with typhus, prisoners lay on a straw mattress in pairs, under a same blanket; there were no sheets or pillows; each evening the nurse would find that three or four had died (out of a hundred or so). There were no doctors, and hygiene was very poor.”⁶⁰

Camp personnel and civilians on the outside were likewise infected, and dead were counted among them as well. The fact that prisoners were continuously transferred from one camp to another and the lack of hygiene were decisive in causing the diseases to spread. During the trial, however, Ferretti ascribed the responsibility for the disease’s entering the camp to the prisoners themselves, echoing the explanation provided by political commissioners and camp managers.⁶¹ While this was true in a sense, the marches and long journeys by train, which prisoners managed to survive, as well as the abysmal hygiene standards that awaited soldiers once in the camps, were the real reasons for the diseases.

His testimony in favor of D’Onofrio bound him, even in public opinion, to the PCI and to the responsibilities its members had had

⁵⁸ *Verbale del dibattimento di Danilo Ferretti al processo D’Onofrio*, 7–8. Ferretti added that D’Onofrio’s “friendliness and humble attire” also impressed prisoners, *ibid*.

⁵⁹ See Ministry of Defense, Department of Military Honors, *Csir-Armir. Campi di prigionia e fosse comuni*, Rome, 1996, 14. On the cause of the particularly high mortality among Italians, see Giusti, *I prigionieri italiani in Russia*, 97, and 126.

⁶⁰ Giusti, *I prigionieri di italiani in Russia*, 104.

⁶¹ Ferretti claimed typhus was brought by the Alpine officers who reached the camp of Oranki (see *Verbale del dibattimento di Danilo Ferretti al processo D’Onofrio*, 5).

in the Russian prison camps.⁶² The deposition was even used against him in a trial Ferretti—like D’Onofrio before him—instituted against “slanderers” who accused him of being one of the people responsible for some of his fellow prisoners’ failure to return.⁶³ The outcome of the two trials was the same. In both cases, the judges rejected the prosecution’s arguments.

Ferretti’s role in the D’Onofrio trial bears witness to his determination to follow communism and his being committed to its diffusion. In the last years of his life, spent in Bologna, he continued to devote himself to teaching, took part in the activities of the PCI section Ferruccio Magnani, and worked for the city’s Public Education Department. Yet he never forgot his fellow prisoners and those who had disappeared in the Russian snow.⁶⁴ Even after 1956, during the easing of relations, he remained faithful to the PCI. He never returned to Russia, however. And after all, his health wouldn’t have allowed him to. Before dying on October 11, 1982, he faced another difficult experience: after undergoing multiple surgeries, he was placed in an iron lung. Although his poor health was the result of the hardships he’d suffered during the war and the years he’d spent in captivity, he never faulted the camps. Even in his final conversations with his closest friends, he never failed to inquire about the annual celebrations to finance the party’s official newspaper, *L’Unità*, and the other events organized by the Communist Party.⁶⁵

Conclusions

What were Danilo Ferretti’s political choices ultimately influenced by? Above all else, his writings reveal that he was frustrated with fascism for promising change without acting on its promises.

⁶² In this regard, see Togliatti’s behavior and his well-known reply to Bianco on the fate of the prisoners apprehended by the Red Army, in Giusti, *I prigionieri italiani in Russia*, 84–87.

⁶³ See E. Antonioni, “Un ricordo per Danilo Ferretti,” *L’Unità*, October 1985.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

In my life as a fascist, only once was I “revolutionary.” It was the time I persuaded the local post office director (a distinguished fascist and member of the directorate) to double the wages of an employee who for twenty years had been barely getting by despite working ten hours a day. I did this, together with my orderly and another fellow townsman, by evoking fascist “principles” and threatening obscure penalties.

A product of the same social ferment was the theory whereby, once the war was over (and, of course, won), we would return to our homeland and make a clean sweep of profiteers, exploiters, and shirkers.

Looking at these two examples, I think the main reason for my detachment from fascism is apparent—my sincere aspiration to social justice.⁶⁶

Following Ferretti’s political course from the beginning to the end, it’s impossible not to see that the peculiar brand of fascism he espoused early on bore the ideological preconditions of his definitive conversion to communism. Fascist institutions had not upheld the values of honesty and justice he, like many of his peers, so strongly believed in. Many young fascists admired the radicalism and violence of the revolution by which Bolsheviks managed to subvert traditional forces. Conversely, to their way of thinking, the latter survived fascism’s victory in Italy. Gradually, many such young intellectuals, despite being sincerely fascist, started detaching themselves from the regime and from political activities, seeking refuge in literature.⁶⁷ Others, like Ferretti, initially saw “war action” as the only tool for real revolution and social change.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ferretti, *The Long Road of a Prisoner of War in the USSR*, 84.

⁶⁷ Romano Bilenchi was among the young intellectuals who completely devoted themselves to literature. As early as 1938–39, he started distancing himself from fascism and from magazines associated with the regime, with which he collaborated, finally turning to communism. “Others and I drew inspiration from Russia, who had managed to free itself of tsars, priests, and lords; we wrote that Moscow was an example to follow, not our enemy,” Bilenchi wrote in R. Bilenchi, *Due ucraini e altri amici* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1990), 139. See also Buchignani, “Romano Bilenchi dal fascismo al comunismo,” 73.

⁶⁸ Berto Ricci, who unlike Bilenchi took part in the activities of the magazine *Incontro*, founded in Florence in February 1940 and edited by Enrico Vallecchi, “flooded numerous fascist party leaders with requests to be sent to the front line, for he saw that conflict as the crowning achievement of all battles, of his every hope, and of his whole life” (Buchignani, “Romano Bilenchi dal fascismo al comunismo,” 73).

Yet the failure of the war, attributed to fascism, and the disappointment toward the regime for its corruption, together with the heavy antifascist propaganda he was subjected to in the camps, produced the transition. In his account, Ferretti ascribes his departure from fascism also to the regime's violence, experienced in Spain and Yugoslavia. Significantly, he refused to see this same aspect in the communist experience.

This is one of the most interesting traits of his story, in that it attests to the force of ideology in rejecting the stimuli of experience. More than the conversion itself, what's surprising is that it occurred in the extreme conditions of captivity. While the Soviet political apparatus invested a great deal of money and energy in propaganda, the latter was hampered by the contrast between Marxist-Leninist theory and real life conditions in the USSR, which prisoners witnessed firsthand, as well as by the indelible memory of the many comrades in arms who died during the first months of imprisonment, which forever haunted those who survived. Yet, when Ferretti was forced to see for himself the state of misery and the material difficulties faced by Soviet society, he ascribed them to the war, not to the communist regime, of which he was only ready to see the positive qualities.

Part III

BEYOND TOTALITARIANISM

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Vasily Grossman

Slavophile and Westernizer Against
the Totalitarian Soviet State

VELJKO VUJAČIĆ

Gregory Freidin argues that in the Soviet Union authorship became the symbolic equivalent of citizenship.¹ The notion of citizenship in this context, however, only partially overlapped with the Western emphasis on formal rights. As Freidin explains, this was because in the Soviet-Russian context the modern roles of the writer as professional and “symbolic citizen” were superimposed on the earlier Orthodox Christian notion of “the holy man’s invocation of a divine calling” whose “preoccupation with ethical and spiritual questions which have no other public forum in Russia except literature becomes inseparable from prophecy or spiritual enlightenment.” As a result “the “modern individualism of literary expression recalls the individuality of sainthood, and the victimization by such a modern rational institution as the political police comes to be identified with a tradition of martyrdom.”² This belief in the charismatic power of the author cum holy man-prophet-martyr was shared by the party authorities and the loyal writers with the consequence that literature became “a dynamic force in its own right”; in other words, a social and political factor to be reckoned with.³

If totalitarianism is one reason why literature acquired such significance in Soviet-type societies, the other one has to do with

¹ G. Freidin, “Authorship and Citizenship: A Problem for Modern Russian Literature,” in *Stanford Slavic Studies*, ed. L. Heishman et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), I, 360–78.

² Ibid., 377.

³ Ibid., 367.

the historical role of the writer in the formation of national culture and consciousness. In Russia, where the lack of a strong indigenous bourgeoisie made the intelligentsia into a unique status group with practically no equivalent in the modern West, the writer-poet became, from the mid-nineteenth century on, the chief interpreter of the collective national experience and his literary creations one of the main means in the social construction of modern national identity. Although the professional historian fulfilled a similar role, the reach of literature was wider by definition, and its greater accessibility to the common man meant that patriotic belles lettres became a standard part of the curricula of emerging educational institutions. As a result, the writer-poet emerged as the intellectual nation-builder par excellence.

The two roles of the author—as *Kulturträger* who interprets the nation's collective experience and as “the conscience of the nation” who speaks the truth in the face of oppressive authority—acquired a special relevance in the post-Stalinist phase of Soviet communism. The end of mass terror, the relaxation of socialist realist literary dogmas, the conscious mobilization of literature for the cause of reform (unmasking the abuses of the “cult of personality”), and the considerable expansion in the scope of permissible discourse, gave the writer a privileged position from which to address the national past. Moreover, the subjective character of the work of fiction made literature less susceptible to ideological regimentation than history or social science. As a result, the writer often went far beyond the official narrative in interpreting the collective experience of the nation. Because literary works preserved informal collective memory and articulated latent national grievances and aspirations well before these could become an object of open public debate, they touched on the core of the official ideological claim that the nationality question had been resolved once and for all under communism. Consequently, literature became the privileged medium for the articulation of national particularism in defiance of internationalist party dogma.

The following discussion of select works of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Vasily Grossman is motivated by the foregoing considerations and the indisputable influence of their interpretations of the Russian historical experience on political discourse in the years immediately

preceding the Soviet breakup. Though Solzhenitsyn and Grossman had advanced these interpretations in works written already during Khrushchev's Thaw, their true political significance became evident only when Gorbachev's glasnost opened the floodgates to the publication of previously banned literary works. The interest of the educated reading public in Grossman's novel *Life and Fate* and his long story *Everything Flows*, and Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Arkhipelago*, can be gauged from the skyrocketing subscription levels of the literary journals *Oktiabr'* and *Novyi mir* that published them.⁴ Because these works appeared at a time when the conflict between "reformists" and "conservatives" in the party *apparatus* and the *Kulturkampf* between "westernizers" and "nativists" in the cultural elite became intimately intertwined with debates about the legacy of Stalinism and Russian national identity, they played an important role in framing the political discourse on the Russian national question. Most important, by highlighting the victimization of the Russian nation by the state as a recurrent leitmotif in Russian (not only Soviet) history, Grossman's and Solzhenitsyn's interpretations played directly into the hands of political advocates of Russia's independence from the "imperial center," a new term that Russia's emerging proto-democratic forces used both in order to highlight the historical continuity of "imperial autocracy" in Soviet-Russian history and to delegitimize the efforts of conservative officialdom to save the Soviet state through the use of force. Finally, while Grossman's and Solzhenitsyn's works were not only ones in which the state-nation dichotomy was restated in stark form, these two authors drew out the political implications of their historical interpretations with the utmost consistency, and did so from very different ideological points of view.⁵

⁴ Between 1987 and 1990, the circulation of *Novyi mir* grew fivefold (from 496,000 to 2,620,000 copies), and the formerly dogmatic *Oktiabr'* almost twofold (from 185,000 to 331,000 copies). See V. Sheinis, *Vzlet i padenie parlamenta. Perelomnye gody v rossiiskoi politike, 1985–1993* (Moscow: Tsentr Karnegi; Fond Indem, 2005), I, 118–19.

⁵ On the deep differences between the two authors, from both biographical and ideological points of view, see two essays that Solzhenitsyn wrote in his late years for the series "Dnevnik pisatel'ia" about Grossman's "diology": "Priemy epopei. Iz 'Literaturnoi kolleksii,'" *Novyi mir* 1 (1998): 177–90 and "Dilogiia Vasiliiia Grossmana. Iz 'Literaturnoi kolleksii,'" *Novyi mir* 8 (2003): 154–69. Grossman never met Solzhenitsyn.

The surprising convergence of historical interpretations advanced by the “neo-Slavophile” Solzhenitsyn and the “Westernizer” Grossman signifies the presence of an underlying political-cultural motif that cuts across traditional ideological divides and speaks to the shared collective experience of the nation.

The “Thaw” in Russian Literature: The Nation as the Victim of the State

Anna Akhmatova’s *Requiem* has been called an “elegy for Russia” and a “song of the motherland.”⁶ Although an elegy is typically “a poem occasioned by the death of an individual,” Akhmatova’s creative pen turns “her son’s and her own suffering” into “a monument for the suffering of an entire nation,” a poem of mourning and remembrance dedicated to the victims of Stalin’s terror.⁷ Throughout the poem numerous devices are used to convey this identification between individual and collective suffering. Thus, the people of Leningrad are depicted as appendages to the city’s prisons and trains taking them into exile, while the city itself “is reduced to tracks that lead from somewhere to nowhere, suggesting that all of Russia has been transformed into a prison.”⁸ The poet compares herself to the wives of the seventeenth-century Streltsy who wailed for mercy in front of the Kremlin walls, implying her identification with the nation’s history and continuity of victimization at the hands of the state. The state itself appears in the form of “disjointed physical minutia,” from soldiers’ boots to the blue-topped caps of the secret police, the Black Marias that take individuals into captivity, and the bolted prison doors that keep them there.⁹ In other words, it is an artificial and oppressive “machine” whose coordinated parts grind the

⁶ S. Bailey, “An Elegy for Russia: Anna Akhmatova’s *Requiem*,” *Slavic and East European Journal* 43 (1999): 324–46. S. Amert, “Akhmatova’s ‘Song of the Motherland’: Rereading the Opening Texts of *Requiem*,” *Slavic Review* 49 (1990): 374–90.

⁷ Bailey, “An Elegy for Russia,” 325, 333; see also Amert, “Akhmatova’s ‘Song of the Motherland,’” 383 et passim.

⁸ Bailey, “An Elegy for Russia,” 335.

⁹ *Ibid.*

living body of the nation. The state is seen as forfeiting its obligation to protect its citizens, emerging instead as their main victimizer:

Net, i ne pod chuzhdym nebosvodom
 I ne pod zashchitoi chuzhdykh kryl,
 Ia byla togda s moim narodom,
 Tam, gde moi narod, k neschastiu byl.

[No, not under a foreign heavenly-cope, and
 Not canopied by foreign wings-
 I was with my people in those hours,
 There where, unhappily, my people were.]¹⁰

In stark opposition to this image of the state as an oppressive force that acts as if it were alien to the *narod* (people, nation) stands the victim—"innocent Russia." The term Akhmatova uses for Russia, however, is not Peter the Great's territorial designation of the imperial state as *Rossiia*, and all of his subjects as *rossiane* (regardless of confessional or ethnic background), but rather the older term *Rus'*, which referred to the ancient land of Muscovy and carried connotations of a community of Holy Orthodox Christian believers who could seek salvation independently of the state. Peter's multi-confessional empire, as distinct from this older "Holy Russia" (*sviataia Rus'*), could be referred to only as *Rossiiskaia* (*not russkaia*) *imperiiia* and its ruler as a *Vserossiiskii* (*not russkii*) *imperator* ("Emperor of All the Russias" as opposed to "Russian emperor"): it was thus an entity that was not politically representative of its "peasant-Christian" (*krestiane-khristiane*) and *pravoslavnye* (Orthodox Christian) subjects—terms that were used as synonyms for *russkii* (of *Holy Rus* or *sviataia Rus'*) before the concept "Russian" acquired its modern national connotation.¹¹ By invoking the image of the ancient

¹⁰ A. Akhmatova, *Requiem and Poem without a Hero*, trans. D. M. Thomas (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976), 23.

¹¹ For the contrast between *Rossiia* and *Rus'* as a metaphor for the tsar (state) and people dichotomy in Russian history, see M. Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People: Studies in Russian Myths* (New York: Random House, 1969). J. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 94, who traces the idea of Holy Russia to Maxim the Greek and his revulsion with the decline of Russia in Ivan the Terrible's time, writes of one of Maxim's descriptions that it metaphorically paints, "in essence . . . the idea of 'Holy

“Holy Russian” land writhing under the tires of pitiless Black Marias, a Mother Russia almost literally raped by the tyrannical patriarchal state, Akhmatova was drawing an unmistakable parallel between the oppressive ways of imperial autocracy and the Soviet state. Confronted with the overwhelming power of the state, the poet wails like a peasant woman, reproaches herself for being a “gay little sinner” in the Tsarskoe Selo¹² of prerevolutionary Russia, and vows to expiate “the indifference of her own generation to the sufferings of the people” by preserving their plight in the collective memory of the nation.¹³

Although written at the height of Stalinist terror (1937–41), Akhmatova’s *Requiem* could have an impact on the intellectual elite only in the period of Khrushchev’s Thaw, a time when, in the words of the poet herself, the two Russias—the Russia of prisoners and the Russia of those who put them there—suddenly found themselves face to face.¹⁴ The theme of “dual Russia”—the official Russia of the state and the Russia of the people—reemerged with a vengeance in the literature of the Thaw period.¹⁵ It is observable both in works which, while critical of Stalin’s autocracy, remained within the confines of socialist realism and in Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*, written in the literary traditions of prerevolutionary times;¹⁶ it is present both in the emerging Russian “village prose” school of literature with its pervasive “metaphors for loss” of the bygone world of peasant ancestors decimated in the

Rus’: humiliated and suffering, yet always compassionate: a wife and mother faithful to her ‘husband’ and ‘children’, the ruler and subjects of Russia, even when mistreated and deserted by them.”

¹² Literally, “the village of the tsar,” it was a famous set of buildings attended by the Russian imperial family near Saint Petersburg. Here Alexander Pushkin attended his studies and Akhmatova spent part of her youth.

¹³ R. Reader, *Anna Akhmatova: Poet and Prophet* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 216–21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 316.

¹⁵ R. Tucker, “The Image of Dual Russia,” in *The Soviet Political Mind* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 121–42.

¹⁶ Among the works that remain within the confines of socialist realism were two influential novels, I. Ehrenburg’s *The Thaw* and V. Dudintsev’s *Not by Bread Alone*. See A. Rothberg, *The Heirs of Stalin: Dissidence and the Soviet Regime, 1953–1970* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), 12–18, and G. Hosking, *Beyond Socialist Realism: Soviet Fiction since Ivan Denisovich* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980).

collectivization drive,¹⁷ and in the prose of Westernizers like Vasily Grossman, who lamented the lost promise of individual freedom once totalitarian controls were reimposed after World War Two; finally, it permeates the personal recollections of prominent members of the “Thaw generation” who emerged as the leaders of the dissident movement in Brezhnev’s time.¹⁸

Solzhenitsyn’s partially autobiographical story “Matryona’s Home” (1963)¹⁹ is both a canonical work of Russian village prose and a neo-Slavophile restatement of the state-people dichotomy. Rich in language and metaphor, “Matryona’s Home” can be read in several different ways, but the most relevant reading for our purposes is the one that sees the story “as an allegorical history of Russia in fictional form.”²⁰

The story begins with a mysterious incident that causes all trains to stop at a crossing exactly “a hundred and eighty-four kilometers from Moscow,” and for “a good year after the incident had taken place.” The cause of the train’s stopping is unknown to the bewildered passengers, but only to the railway engineers and the narrator himself. The ominous overtone of the opening lines, however, suggests a tragic confrontation between the train—the symbol of Soviet progress and modernization more generally—and the victim(s) whose fate is not known to the “public” (passengers), but only to the narrator and the select few. The story that unfolds can thus be read as an epitaph, a vehicle for preserving the victims’ fate in collective memory.²¹

The narrator of the story is a mathematics teacher by the name of Ignatich, released from the camps in the summer of 1953, just months

¹⁷ K. Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

¹⁸ L. Alexeeva and P. Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990).

¹⁹ A. Solzhenitsyn, *Stories and Prose Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), 3–52. All subsequent references to the text are from this edition. Instead of “Matryona’s House,” however, I use “Matryona’s Home.” When references to Russian terms are made, the original text consulted is A. Solzhenitsyn, *Rassказы. Maloe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Inkom, 1991), III, 112–59. For the autobiographical element, see M. Scammel, *Solzhenitsyn: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 356–72.

²⁰ H. Ragsdale, “The Solzhenitsyn That Nobody Knows,” *Virginia Quarterly Review* LXXI (1995): 634–41. I thank Professor Ragsdale for making this reference available to me.

²¹ S.A. Spitz, “The Impact of Structure in Solzhenitsyn’s ‘Matryona’s Home,’” *Russian Review* 36 (1977): 167–83.

after Stalin's death. Making his way from "the hot, dusty wastelands" of Asia, his return home "delayed by a little matter of ten years," Ignatich "aimlessly" wanders back—"simply to Russia" (*prosto v Rossiю*), wishing to "vanish in the very heartland of Russia—if there were such a place." The beginning is promising: "the atmosphere in the country has already started to change," the black leather doors separating the people from the state bureaucracy have been replaced by glass partitions "as in a pharmacy" (suggesting transparency and, at least potentially, a service attitude), and Ignatich is sent by the obliging officialdom to the resolutely Russian-sounding village of High Field (*Vysokoe pole*), situated on a hill, "encircled by a wood," and with a "pond and a dyke"—the very image of the Russian heartland. But the picturesque Russian village produces nothing, not even its own bread, so that Ignatich is forced to settle for the ugly, Soviet-sounding "peat produce" (*Torfoprodukt*), the name itself a symbolic insult, as the narrator tells us, to Turgenev's beautiful Russian language. Once covered by a "silent, impenetrable forest," peat produce had become, thanks to collective chairman who had cut down the forest for profit, a village "scattered among the peat diggings," polluted by the factory and the railway line, and with cottages devoid of walled partitions—so that Ignatich could not find "a room that had four proper walls." Fortunately, in a chance encounter with a touchingly kind peasant woman who gives him a bottle of milk, Ignatich discovers the neighboring village of Talnovo, which "had been there from times immemorial." The antiquity of the village and its name—together with the equally resounding old Russian names of villages beyond Talnovo—holds for the Ignatich "the promise of the true, legendary Russia." Eventually, the narrator settles for a room in the home of Matryona Vasilevna, an old peasant woman.

Matryona's dilapidated house is located behind a stream, with "ducks swimming on the pond, and geese waddling up the bank to shake themselves," the prettiest "spot in the whole village"—and the very antithesis of peat produce. The house itself is spacious but neglected, with an old lame cat, mice, and cockroaches, and little by way of food in the bargain. But none of this presents a problem for Ignatich, "because experience had taught me not to regard food as the main object of life" (an obvious reference to life in camp), while

the sound of mice has “nothing false or deceptive about it” (in contrast to the pervasive lie of Soviet life). Matryona herself, as the reader discovers, epitomizes the suffering Russian peasant woman: dismissed from the collective farm on account of illness, unable to sustain herself on her deceased husband’s small pension (which she struggles to obtain against a host of bureaucratic obstacles), she works hard on her small garden plot and scrounges peat from the state trust, like the villagers who “had once stolen wood from the landlord.”

Matryona’s moving life story begins in 1914, when her husband Faddei is mobilized for the war and does not return. Thinking him dead, Matryona accepts the proposal of his brother Yefim. But when Faddei unexpectedly comes back he is mad with rage at this “betrayal,” and vows to find himself another wife with the name Matryona. This second “Matryona” bears Faddei six children, but he is an ungrateful and abusive husband. By contrast, Yefim treats Matryona fairly well despite the fact that she lost all her prospective six children in their infancy (although he is disdainful of Matryona’s peasant ways, and has a mistress in the city). Faced with these losses, Yefim and Matryona adopt one of her namesake’s daughters, Kira, and bring her up in their household. When World War II breaks out, Yefim is mobilized, and, unlike his brother Faddei, never returns. Not long before Ignatich’s arrival to Talnovo, Kira is married and moves to a neighboring village, leaving old Matryona alone in her house. But the prospect of acquiring a piece of land brings Kira back, if only to ask Matryona to take the wood from the upper floor of her house (this upper floor bequeathed to Kira in Matryona’s will) so that she could build her own. After some hesitation, Matryona succumbs under pressure from Kira and her first husband Faddei (Kira’s biological father). On the fateful day Faddei and his sons come to dismantle the upper floor of the house and transport the wood on two sledges drawn by a tractor. But when the second sledge unexpectedly gets stuck on the railway tracks, a terrible accident occurs: two coupled locomotives going backwards demolish the sledge and kill Matryona (who volunteered to help) and one of Faddei’s sons.

Matryona’s shockingly violent death forces the narrator (Ignatich) to see the old woman in a different light. Although a poor housekeeper who did not even care to acquire a pig or decent clothes (things that

were within her reach and could have improved her life), although “a stranger to her own family” and a “fool” who “worked for others for no reward,” Matryona, Ignatich realizes, was the epitome of selfless kindness: “None of us who lived close to her perceived that she was the one righteous person [*pravednitsa*] without whom, as the saying goes, no city can stand. Neither can the whole world.”

The bare outline of the story’s plot gives few clues about the complex layer of meanings hidden in the original Russian text. Throughout the story, Solzhenitsyn uses a variety of narrative techniques, linguistic devices, and metaphors in order to transform Matryona into “a Russian icon,” a symbol of the suffering Russian people (*narod*).²² In the first place, the name Matryona is etymologically related to both “Matryoshka” (the famous Russian nesting dolls) and *mat*—the Russian word for “mother.” Matryona is also, in the words of the narrator, a *rodnoi chelovek* (one of one’s own, as in one’s own kin)—a veiled reference to the Russian word for motherland (*rodina*). When the narrator concludes that “one of one’s own was killed” (*ubit rodnoi chelovek*), he makes the connection between Matryona and *rodina* transparent, suggesting that the old peasant woman symbolically stands for Russia itself, while her violent death and dismembered body is implicitly likened to the slain and mutilated body of the motherland. Many other elements of the story make this connection clear—from Matryona’s half-pagan, half-Christian Russian folkways to her peasant speech and her simplicity and selfless honesty—the quintessential traits of the peasantry as the symbol of the Russian nation in traditional Slavophile imagery. Not the least important is the contrast between the female characters (the two Matryonas) and their husbands. As Hugh Ragsdale has written, “As there were two Matryonas, so there have been two Russias. Yefim treated Matryona Vasilevna as Peter I treated his Russia. He was not so deliberately abusive as his Soviet successors, but he scorned native culture and went a-whoring after the fashions of Europe. The fate of Faddei’s Matryona II was like that of Soviet Russia, more abused

²² See, in particular, the excellent analysis in R.L. Jackson, “‘Matryona’s Home’: The Making of a Russian Icon,” in *Solzhenitsyn. A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. K. Feuer (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 60–71.

and more productive. 'Love your wife like your soul, shake her like a pear tree.'²³

The image of "dual Russia," the Russia of the tyrannical patriarchal state and the suffering Mother Russia of the *narod* reappears in the story under the guise of a series of further contrasts: between the unnamed train station official who refuses to sell tickets to the passengers and the unknown peasant woman who gives Ignatich a bottle of milk (the giving Mother Russia) and directs him to the village of Talnovo; between the mangled Soviet language of peat produce and the idyllic-sounding names of old Russian villages; between the industrial pollution of the "peat village" and the unspoiled nature of old Russia—the "pond with a dyke" surrounded by a forest; between the impersonality of Soviet offices (the bureaucracy) and the intimacy of Matryona's flawed but cozy village home; between the greed of the villagers morally bankrupted by the secular Soviet state and the iconic image of Matryona as a selfless if simple Christian peasant. But the key metaphor for the inhuman force of Soviet modernization is the train which, moving backwards, senselessly destroys human beings on its relentless march to an allegedly better future (the Soviet "ever forwards"). The train, however, appears here not just as a symbol of the unstoppable force of materialist modernity but also of the "arbitrary cruelty" of a blind state that cares little for the fate of its people.²⁴ As in Akhmatova's *Requiem*, the Soviet state appears in the form of a brute mechanical force that tears at the living body of the nation.²⁵ The glimmer of hope for the nation, on the other hand, resides with those who silently commemorate the victims by stopping the train at the place of the accident "for a good year after the event." It also resides in the narrator himself who records the story for subsequent generations. The preservation of collective memory thus becomes both a means of confrontation with

²³ Ragsdale, "The Solzhenitsyn That Nobody Knows," 638.

²⁴ Spitz, "The Impact of Structure in Solzhenitsyn's 'Matryona's Home,'" 172. Spitz speaks of the train as a symbol of "arbitrary cruelty," but leaves the connection between arbitrary cruelty and the state unexplored, perhaps because it is too obvious.

²⁵ It is hardly an accident that Akhmatova had the highest words of praise for Solzhenitsyn while the latter considered her the greatest poet of her generation. See Reader, *Anna Akhmatova*, 371–73.

the overbearing state and a way of recovering for the future the true Christian-peasant values deeply rooted in the nation's soil.

"Matryona's Home" encapsulates in concise form all the main themes of Solzhenitsyn's better known works, from the most explosive work published during Khrushchev's second de-Stalinization campaign, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962), to the celebrated *Gulag Archipelago* which could not be published in Russia until late into the perestroika period. Just like Matryona, Shukov, the victim of the Gulag in *Ivan Denisovich*, is also a simple Russian peasant whose cruel fate embodies the suffering of the whole nation. Like Matryona, Shukov exhibits the moral resilience of the simple *narod* in the face of the overwhelming cruelty of the Soviet state. More broadly, the parallels between the grey world of the concentration camps depicted in *Ivan Denisovich* and the only slightly more "brighter world" of the polluted Soviet village of peat produce depicted in "Matryona's Home" are all too obvious.²⁶ The blurred boundaries between the world of the Gulag and everyday Soviet life make the concentration camp into a pervasive metaphor for Soviet society as a whole. The theme is too well known in Solzhenitsyn's work to be pursued further here.²⁷

Vasily Grossman and the Unfulfilled Promise of the Stalingrad Battle

If Solzhenitsyn powerfully restates the state-people dichotomy in neo-Slavophile terms, in his novel about the battle of Stalingrad, *Life and Fate*, Vasily Grossman does so from the Westernizer point of view. Whereas Solzhenitsyn documents and records the fate of millions of

²⁶ C. Moody, *Solzhenitsyn* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1973), 28–50.

²⁷ For further critical analysis, see *ibid.* See also Hosking, *Beyond Socialist Realism*, 29–50, 101–23; Feuer, *Solzhenitsyn*; J. Dunlop, R. Haugh, and A. Klimoff, eds., *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1975); L. Rzhevsky, *Solzhenitsyn: Creator and Heroic Deed* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1972); A. Klimoff, ed., *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich: A Critical Companion* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997); V.V. Kuzmin, *Poetika rasskazov A. I. Solzhenitsyna* (Tver: Tverskoi gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1998).

victims of the Soviet Gulag, Grossman shatters the official view of the “Great Patriotic War”—the only other event with a similar emotional resonance in the Russian collective mind in the contemporary period. *Life and Fate* is a panoramic portrait of Soviet society during the battle of Stalingrad, an epic on the scale of Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*. Completed during Khrushchev’s “second Thaw” (the early 1960s), *Life and Fate* was considered so explosive in its time that Mikhail Suslov, the gray eminence of ideological officialdom, personally told Grossman that the novel would not be published for another 250 years. The original manuscript was nevertheless preserved and smuggled to the West where it was published in 1980, appearing for the first time in Russia in serialized form on the pages of the journal *Oktiabr’* in 1988. Even at that time, however, the novel caused a storm of controversy, with orthodox communists attacking it for distorting the historical truth about the war, and extreme Russian nationalists lambasting it for its exposure of the connection between anti-Semitism and Russian nationalism.²⁸

Ostensibly devoted to the heroes of the battle of Stalingrad, the decisive World War II battle on the eastern front, *Life and Fate* is dominated by a single overriding theme, the confrontation between the power of the oppressive state and the equally unstoppable force of individual freedom. In culminating moments of the novel Grossman draws explicit parallels between the totalitarian regimes of Stalin’s Russia and Nazi Germany, striking at the very heart of the official ideological claim about the Great Patriotic War as the struggle of the “freedom-loving

²⁸ Grossman was, together with Ilya Ehrenburg and Konstantin Simonov, the best-known Soviet war correspondent and a witness of the battle of Stalingrad. He was also the first war correspondent anywhere to chronicle the world of the Nazi concentration camps in “The Hell of Treblinka.” For Grossman’s biography, his encounter with Treblinka, and his confrontation with his own Jewish-Russian identity, see J. Garrard and C. Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev: The Life and Fate of Vasily Grossman* (New York: Free Press, 1996). The story of Grossman’s novel and his last years (Grossman died in 1964, several years after his manuscript was “arrested” by the Soviet authorities) is documented in S. Lipkin, *Stalingrad Vasiliia Grossmana* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986). For Suslov’s remarks and the subsequent history of the novel’s publication in the West and the Soviet Union, see F. Ellis, *Vasily Grossman: The Genesis and Evolution of a Russian Heretic* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 1–27. For the controversy caused by the novel’s publication during perestroika, see V.D. Oskotskii, ed., *S raznykh tochek zrenia. Zhizn’ i sud’ba V. Grossmana* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel, 1991).

peoples of the Soviet Union” against the “fascist hordes.” If individuals in Grossman’s novel are indeed freedom-loving, they pursue the cause of freedom in defiance of the explicit commands of the totalitarian Soviet state. Grossman’s heroes are the ordinary fighters in the rubble of Stalingrad who halt the Nazi offensive against overwhelming odds and in the face of certain death, tank commanders like colonel Novikov who delay the offensive in order to save the lives of their soldiers in defiance of Stalin’s orders, and physicists like Viktor Shtrum (a partially autobiographical character) who discover the intrinsic connection between freedom and scientific creation. Contrasted to them are the sycophantic and cruel members of Soviet officialdom like Novikov’s political commissar Getmanov whose loyalty to Stalin as the embodiment of official state patriotism assumes a grotesque character. As John Garrard writes in relation to a scene that depicts a gathering of officials in Getmanov’s home:

The party and the NKVD elite who have gathered together use the word *otechestvo* [fatherland] for the Soviet Union, in marked contrast to the more homely Russian term *rodina*, suggesting two further oppositions: father-mother and Soviet Union-Russia. Grossman portrays Stalin and his filial apparatchiks as hypocritical traitors—Stalin has betrayed Mother Russia, just as Getmanov betrays his wife in numerous affairs. These men are the figurative sons of Stalin and render their allegiance to him and the Soviet family-state, rather than to their own wives and children. One of the assembled group looks at Getmanov’s picture album and sees a photograph of Getmanov’s office, with a picture of Stalin hanging on the wall. Getmanov’s four-year old son has drawn a moustache on Stalin’s portrait in the photograph. The reduction in scale from the portrait on the wall to the portrait on the photograph does much to give this scene a “Mad Hatter’s Tea Party” quality, for Getmanov’s hyperbolic reaction to his toddler’s tiny graffiti is grotesque: “Hooliganism.”²⁹

Throughout the novel, Grossman juxtaposes the patriarchal cruelty that stands at the center of official state ideology with its apotheosis of

²⁹ J. Garrard, “Stepsons in the Motherland: The Architectonics of Vasilii Grossman’s *Zhizn’ i sud’ba*,” *Slavic Review* 50 (1991): 336–46.

“Stalin, our father” (*otets Stalin*) with the tenderness of selfless motherly love, using it as a metaphor for the historic confrontation between the cruel patrimonial (and, in this case, totalitarian) state and the suffering people of the *rodina*. As Garrard points out, this emphasis on the redeeming quality of motherly love is deeply rooted in the Russian Orthodox tradition with its apotheosis of the Virgin Mary as “the embodiment of selfless love and mercy.”³⁰ This Slavophile motif in *Life and Fate* is further developed in the character of Ikonnikov-Morzh, a Russian prisoner of war in the Nazi camp, and one of the few male characters in the novel who exhibits “motherly tenderness.” Ikonnikov’s highly suggestive name (“icon”) is no accident, for he is a descendent of a family of Old Believer priests and a former Tolstoyan who preserves his faith in “blind” human kindness even in the Nazi concentration camp. Ikonnikov’s confiscated treatise on the unstoppable power of human kindness in the face of persecution by the totalitarian state, however, is the subject of mockery on the part of both the shrewd and cynical Gestapo officer Liss and the imprisoned Comintern official Mostovskoy whose ideological blinders prevent them from seeing the simplest human truth.³¹

If the contrast between the patriarchal state and the motherly *rodina*, between state violence and Christian kindness, mirrors a similar one drawn by Akhmatova in *Requiem* and Solzhenitsyn in “Matryona’s Home,” Grossman goes further than the celebrated poet and the chronicler of the Gulag in exposing the mechanism of official patriotism. An integral part of this “Russia for the Russians” and “Russia first” official state ideology is xenophobic nationalism manifested in a derogatory attitude towards the smaller nationalities, the Jews in particular. The incorporation of the crudest anti-Semitism into official state ideology is exposed as the main mechanism of the cooptation of patriotism for the cause of the oppressive state, an appeal to the “support of fools, reactionaries, and failures, that is seeking to capitalize on the ignorance of the superstitious and the anger of the hungry.”³² As Commissar

³⁰ Ibid., 341.

³¹ For Ikonnikov’s treatise, see *Life and Fate* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 403–10.

³² Ibid., 487.

Getmanov exclaims in a conversation with his tank commander Novikov: “We are certainly not having synagogues and meeting houses in our tank corps. We are, after all, defending Russia . . . In the name of the friendship of nations we keep sacrificing the Russians. A member of a national minority barely needs to know the alphabet to be appointed a people’s commissar, while our Ivan, no matter if he’s a genius, has to ‘yield place to the minorities.’ The great Russian people is becoming a national minority itself.”³³ The real content of official state patriotism is not the proletariat as the most forward-looking class in world history, but the Russian nation led by the infallible Stalin as exemplified in the idea of “socialism in one country” with its supporting pillars of xenophobic nationalism and Black Hundred style anti-Semitism. In this respect, as Gestapo officer Liss explains to his stunned party intellectual Mostovskoy, there is little difference between Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism:

“A red workers” flag flies over our People’s State too. We too call people to National Achievement, to Unity and Labor. We say, “The Party expresses the dream of the German worker”; you say, “Nationalism, Labor!” You know as well as we do that nationalism is the most powerful force of our century. Nationalism is the soul of our epoch. And “Socialism in One Country” is the supreme expression of nationalism.

I don’t see any reason for our enmity. But the teacher of genius, the leader of the German people, our father, the best friend of all German mothers, the brilliant and wise strategist, began this war. And I believe in Hitler. And I know that Stalin’s mind is in no way clouded by pain and anger. Through all the fire and smoke of war he can see the truth. He knows his true enemy. Yes—even now when he discusses joint military strategy with him and drinks to his health. There are two great revolutionaries in the world—Stalin and our leader. It is their will that gave birth to State National Socialism. . .

You knew Lenin personally. He created a new type of party. He was the first to understand that only the Party and its Leader can express the spirit of the nation. He did away with the Constituent Assembly. But just as Maxwell destroyed Newton’s system of mechanics while thinking he had confirmed it, so Lenin considered himself a builder

³³ Ibid., 221.

of internationalism while in actual fact he was creating the greatest nationalism of the twentieth century. . . . And we learnt many things from Stalin. To build Socialism in One Country, one must destroy the peasants' freedom to sow what they like and sell what they like. Stalin didn't shilly-shally—he liquidated millions of peasants. Our Hitler saw that the Jews were the enemy hindering the German National Socialist movement. And he liquidated millions of Jews. But Hitler's no mere student; he is a genius in his own right. And he's not one to be squeamish either. It was the Roehm purge that gave Stalin the idea for the purge of the party in 1937. . . . You must believe me. You've kept silent while I've been talking but I know that I'm like a mirror for you—a surgical mirror."³⁴

Grossman's exposure of the inhuman power of the national socialist state and the similarities between Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism certainly helps explain why his novel was considered unfit for publication "for the next 250 years" by Soviet officialdom. But it also explains why the idea of individual freedom becomes a veritable obsession of so many of his Russian characters, by no means only intellectuals. A case in point is Commander Grekov, a most ordinary man and the head of a small company of soldiers who defend a strategically located building (labeled House 6/1) in the rubble of Stalingrad. Faced with the certainty of death, the commander and his soldiers exemplify the patriotism of individuals who have no use for hypocritical state ideology let alone superfluous state orders. When Commissar Krymov visits House 6/1 in order to curtail Grekov's individualistic leadership and enforce party discipline among the soldiers, he finds that Grekov runs his company more like the "Paris commune" than a hierarchical party-state army. Grekov's mocking attitude towards Krymov and the egalitarian spirit of the company are a direct offense to the hypocrisy of Soviet officialdom, a small island of Russian freedom about to be crushed by the twin forces of Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism. As Grekov makes clear to Krymov, he and his soldiers are fighting not only against Hitler, but *for freedom*, for the abolition of the collective farms, and an end to the

³⁴ Ibid., 402–3.

general coercion of the prewar period.³⁵ The great irony of this episode is that individual freedom is purchased at the price of one's life in the rubble of Stalingrad.

The "spirit of Stalingrad," the spirit of individualist patriotism and the yearning for freedom, however, survives in the interstices of the totalitarian state: it is present, ironically, in the Soviet concentration camps where honest conversations about the failures of the Soviet system and Stalinist ideology can take place unconstrained; it lives on in individuals like the air force pilot Viktorov, tank commander Novikov, and the snipers of Stalingrad who must carry on their battles *as individuals*, not just "cogs in the wheel" of Stalin's "great state mechanism"; it makes an appearance in Viktor Shtrum's circle of friends who temporarily overcome their fear of the totalitarian state by engaging in a long conversation about freedom; and it lives on in the person of Viktor Shtrum himself whose great scientific discovery occurs precisely after this conversation about freedom. As the decisive victory at Stalingrad approaches, however, the regime gradually puts an end to these islands of freedom, reclaiming the victory achieved by patriotic individuals for the glory of the all-mighty Soviet state. In this "remorseless cunning of history" Grossman sees the true meaning of Stalingrad: "Freedom engendered the Russian victory. Freedom was the apparent aim of the war. But the sly fingers of History changed this: freedom became simply a way for waging the war, a means to an end."³⁶

The character in the novel who discovers this ironic truth for himself is the physicist Viktor Shtrum whose remarkable scientific discovery leads to his promotion and return to a Moscow scientific institute. But as official anti-Semitism becomes the order of the day, Shtrum's Jewish laboratory associates are prevented from joining him, while he himself is faced with the opposition of powerful ideological hacks in

³⁵ Ibid., 427–28. Ironically, Krymov himself becomes a victim of the purges after he denounces Grekov. For a more extensive analysis of this episode in the novel see Ellis, *Vasilii Grossman*, 87–90, 94–97.

³⁶ Ibid., 488. For a more extensive analysis of this motif as well as state-sponsored anti-Semitism, see J. Garrard, "A Conflict of Visions, Vasilii Grossman and the Russian Idea," in *The Search for Self-definition in Russian Literature*, ed. E.M. Thompson (Houston, TX: Rice University Press, 1991), 57–76.

the scientific establishment and the increasing informal boycott of his colleagues who want him to renounce scientific theories that violate the “party spirit in science.” Shtrum is terrified of the omnipotent state, and its image haunts him like an evil ghost: “Viktor felt a shiver of fear, the fear that was always lurking in his heart—fear of the State’s anger, fear of being a victim of this anger that could crush a man and grind him to dust.”³⁷ Shtrum is in awe of the power of a state that “raises a man up, then throws him effortlessly into the abyss”;³⁸ at a later point in the novel still, “he could feel tangibly the difference in weight between the fragile human body and the colossus of the State. He could feel the State’s bright eyes gazing into his face; any moment now the State would crash down on him; there would be a crack, a squeal—and he would be gone.”³⁹ Although not beyond opportunism, nor, obviously, concern with his own survival or the fate of his family, Shtrum refuses to repent. Even at this moment, however, his primary motivation is not any kind of superhuman courage but the realization of his own impotence: “He was of no use to anyone. Whether he repented or not, he was of equally little significance to the furious State.”⁴⁰ Ironically, Viktor is saved from this terrible fate by a phone call from Stalin who realizes that his scientific knowledge is indispensable to the state. Viktor’s acceptance of his own rehabilitation, however, comes at the price of the loss of moral autonomy, making his “victory” a largely illusory one.⁴¹

The key question for Grossman is whether *freedom*—the “soul of wartime Stalingrad”—can survive this fateful confrontation with the omnipotent totalitarian state. The fate of Stalingrad itself seems to suggest a negative answer, for only ten years after the decisive battle, writes Grossman, one of the largest hydroelectric power stations in the world was constructed in the city, “the product of the forced labor of thousands of prisoners.”⁴² On the other hand, the wartime uprisings

³⁷ Grossman, *Life and Fate*, 569.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 585.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 668.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 761.

⁴¹ Ellis, *Vasily Grossman*, 188–89.

⁴² Grossman, *Life and Fate*, 798.

in the Warsaw ghetto, Treblinka, and Sobibor, the appearance of partisan movements in occupied territories, the postwar uprisings in Berlin (1953) and Hungary (1956), the rebellions in Stalin's concentration camps after his death, and the riots in Poland (1956), "bear witness to the indestructibility of man's yearning for freedom." The question is obviously of such paramount importance for Grossman that he considers this violation of the novel's narrative structure (it was, after all, about the war, not the postwar period) insignificant by comparison.⁴³

Grossman's *Life and Fate* expresses the nonextinguished hope of the wartime generation that the "truth of the trenches" (*okopnaia pravda*) and the individualist civic patriotism of the war would result in profound political changes in the postwar period. In Grossman's view, the war offered a chance to expiate the prewar Stalinist crimes of collectivization and the purges (1937), and secure a better world in which truth and good would prevail over the forces of "evil, darkness, and misanthropy." In this respect, the destruction of the Nazi war machine and liberation of the Nazi concentration camps was the singular most important achievement of the "Stalingrad spirit."⁴⁴ The hope of ultimate liberation, however, was put to a severe test not only by the Stalinist retrenchment of the postwar years but also during Khrushchev's Thaw, which witnessed a concerted attack on Stalin's "cult of personality" and the release of millions of prisoners from Stalin's Gulag. The fate of one such prisoner and his encounter with post-Stalinist society is the subject of Grossman's long story *Everything Flows* (1963), which demolishes Soviet ideological myths in an even more radical fashion than *Life and Fate*.⁴⁵

When the main character of the story, Ivan Grigorievich, unexpectedly returns to Moscow after almost thirty years in prison and the Gulag, he faces a wall of bad faith, suppressed guilt, and silence.

⁴³ Ibid., 216.

⁴⁴ This is a paraphrase of Grossman's own conversation with his friend Semen Lipkin. See Ellis, *Vasiliy Grossman*, 113, 147.

⁴⁵ V. Grossman, *Everything Flows* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972). Grossman completed *Everything Flows* in 1963, just before his death. The story first made its appearance in the Soviet Union on the pages of the literary journal *Oktiabr'* in June 1989. See Ellis, *Vasiliy Grossman*, 21.

Ivan's encounter with his cousin, Nikolai Andreevich, a career scientist who opportunistically took the side of the state at the time of the notorious "Doctor's plot" which implicated Jewish doctors in an alleged conspiracy to kill Stalin (1953), ends in just one evening. Nikolai's well-intentioned attempt at reconciliation is necessarily clumsy, for his protestations to Ivan that life outside the Gulag also had its difficulties, and that the persecution of Jewish doctors was not a purge but the triumph of "the Russian national spirit" in science, hides decades of conformity and exposes the hypocrisy of official ideological rationalizations. Ivan's silence is both a tacit condemnation of Nikolai's attempt at self-justification and a sign that communication between the two Russias, "the Russia of the prisoners and the Russia of those who put them there"—to borrow Akhmatova's terminology—is not really possible. Ivan's subsequent accidental street encounter in Leningrad with Pinegin, the person who had denounced him, brings out the bad conscience in this Stalinist "Judas."⁴⁶ Whereas Pinegin continues to believe that Ivan Grigorievich does not know the full story behind his arrest, Ivan's "unreproachful glance" causes him to reconsider his life of government honors and decorations, his beautiful wife and children, his country house—"he would give up every last bit of it, just so as not to feel those eyes resting upon him."⁴⁷ But Pinegin nevertheless goes in bad faith. To Ivan, on the other hand, these brief experiences with "life in freedom," suggest that "barbed wire was no longer necessary, that life outside the barbed wire had been assimilated in its inner essence into life in camp."⁴⁸ The immutability, permanence, and pervasiveness of the camp and the camp mentality make a mockery of Marxian dialectics: "Yes, everything was forever flowing, forever changing, and every prisoner train was and will be different from the one before and the one coming after. One can never enter the same train twice."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Grossman, *Everything Flows*, 68–83, contains a vivisection of different types of Stalinist Judas-style denouncers.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

Faced with the hypocrisy of Moscow, the inhumanely monumental capital, disillusioned with the city of Peter the Great, that “bronze horseman” whom he now sees as the initiator of Russia’s subsequent path along the long road to state tyranny,⁵⁰ Ivan Grigorievich settles as a lathe operator in a metalworking *artel* (artisan cooperative) for the disabled in an unnamed southern Russian city. His brief affair with his landlady and a cook in local mess hall, Anna Sergeevna, who soon dies of cancer, becomes a vehicle for an exchange of the bitter truth about the past, Ivan Grigorievich’s reflections on his life in the camp, and Russia’s troubled destiny. Anna Sergeevna’s graphic description of the deliberate starvation of peasants in Ukraine during collectivization is the most devastating condemnation of the inhumanity of the Soviet state in any work of postwar Russian literature.⁵¹ It is Ivan Grigorievich, however, who discovers the deeper meaning of these harrowing collective experiences, by reflecting on the *why* of collectivization, the purges, and the Gulag.

The answer, Ivan believes, is to be found not just in the Soviet period, but in the whole course of modern Russian history. The essence of this history, according to Ivan Grigorievich, is the continued subjection of society to the ever mightier state. From its very inception, the development of the Russian state was predicated upon the gradual extension of serfdom to ever wider strata of the peasantry. This process was intensified under Peter the Great who firmly established the connection between progress and serfdom. The “dialectic” of progress through serfdom was challenged in the nineteenth century, culminating in the February revolution in 1917, which, for the first time, opened up the prospect of freedom for Russia. Instead, “Russia chose Lenin” who was himself “the slave of Russian history” in the sense that “he preserved that link between progress and slavery which has historically been Russia’s curse.”⁵² Lenin was not an aberration, but the logical heir to the Russian state tradition, and the intellectual child of a long line of

⁵⁰ Ibid., 64.

⁵¹ Ibid., 138–66.

⁵² Ibid., 214–15.

Russian thinkers whose different formulations about the purity of the “Russian soul” and Russia’s messianic path to a better future had “one fatal fallacy in common”: this was their failure to see “that the particular qualities of the Russian soul did not derive from freedom, and that the Russian soul had been a slave for a thousand years. What could a slave of a thousand years give the world, even a slave become omnipotent?”⁵³ From this point of view, Russia’s Westernization appears superficial because the adoption of Western ways was not accompanied by internal transformation: “The chasm lay in the fact that Western development was based on a growth in freedom, while Russia’s was based on the intensification of slavery.”⁵⁴ Stalin’s final consolidation of state power is presented as the culmination of the statist idea in Russian history. But Stalin’s “fear of freedom” was still such that he had to pay lip service to the idea of freedom, even as he extinguished its last vestiges: “dead freedom became an ornament of the state,” that is part of an elaborate state show with a constitution, parliament, elections, and the like.⁵⁵

Grossman (who, we presume, speaks through the thoughts of Ivan Grigorievich) does not “essentialize” Russian history: the growth of state power and “slavery” was the product of the impact of innumerable and unique factors. But the question remains whether Russia will ever be able to achieve freedom, which for Grossman is the essence of the history of humanity. The question is all the more acute as the various rationalizations of Russia’s special path to the modern world reflect the inability of even Russia’s “greatest prophets” and “geniuses” to distinguish freedom from slavery.⁵⁶ In arguing thus, Grossman completely repudiates all Slavophile versions of the Russian national myth, seeing in them little more than rationalizations of Russia’s fundamental “backwardness” vis-à-vis the West in the one area that truly counts: individual freedom.

⁵³ Ibid., 208–9.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 212.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 228.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 218–19.

Solzhenitsyn and Grossman: Overlapping Interpretations of the Soviet-Russian Past

Enough has been said to show that the theme of “dual Russia”—the Russia of the state and the Russia of the people (whether the concept of the people is understood in the collectivist Slavophile or individualist Westernizer sense)—runs like a red thread through some of the most representative works of the Thaw period. Solzhenitsyn and Grossman, neo-Slavophile and Westernizer, represented two different poles of the intellectual and political spectrum.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, both saw the state as the main victimizer of the Russian people, characterized totalitarianism as a specifically twentieth-century phenomenon that resulted in an infinitely greater concentration of state power than was ever imaginable in tsarist Russia, identified Lenin as its founding father, depicted collectivization as a political genocide, and used the concentration camp as a metaphor for Soviet society as a whole. Moreover, Solzhenitsyn’s view of the war is not too different from Grossman’s vision in *Life and Fate*. As an artillery officer who distinguished himself in combat only to be deported on account of his careless correspondence with a friend in which he took offense at Stalin, Solzhenitsyn had a special understanding for the tragic fate of the Russian prisoners of war who were sent to the Gulag upon their “homecoming” in 1945.⁵⁸

In “That Spring,” the chapter devoted to the Russian prisoners of war in *The Gulag Archipelago*,⁵⁹ Solzhenitsyn examines their gruesome fate under the heading of a “threefold betrayal” by the Soviet state: first, in 1941 when the poor preparations for the war left Russian soldiers at the mercy of the enemy; secondly, when “the Motherland . . . abandoned them to die in captivity”; finally, when “the Motherland” coaxed them to come home only to deport them to the camps upon their return for fear that the “spirit of European freedom” would pose a threat to

⁵⁷ See also V. Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁵⁸ For Solzhenitsyn’s wartime experience and his subsequent arrest, see Scammell, *Solzhenitsyn*, 112–43.

⁵⁹ A. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation, 1918–1956* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) I–II, 237–77.

Stalin's regime. Subsequently treated as "traitors to the Motherland," these soldiers were, as the official Soviet slip of the tongue put it, "traitors of the Motherland," that is were betrayed by her (*izmenniki rodiny*, the genitive case here suggesting traitors *of* the Motherland not *to* the Motherland).⁶⁰ Like Grossman, Solzhenitsyn sees the war as having been won by the ordinary soldier—"only Ivan fighting for Holy Russia halted the Germans on the Volga."⁶¹ Solzhenitsyn's use of the term "Holy Russia" (*sviataia Rus*) to describe the Russia of the people ("Ivan") in this context is hardly accidental, as it is designed to underscore the distinction between ordinary Russian people as the collective hero of the war and Stalin's neopatrimonial state that subsequently claimed the victory for itself. The moral lesson that Solzhenitsyn derives from this experience is telling:

There is a simple truth which one can learn only through suffering: in war not victories are blessed but defeats. Governments needs victories, and the people need defeats. Victory gives rise to the desire for more victories. But after defeat it is freedom that men desire—and usually attain. A people needs defeat just as an individual needs suffering and misfortune: they compel the deepening of the inner life and generate a spiritual upsurge. The Poltava victory was a great misfortune for Russia: it resulted in two centuries of great strain and stress, ruin, and the absence of freedom—and war and war again. The Poltava victory spelled salvation for the Swedes. Having lost the appetite for war, the Swedes became the most prosperous and the freest people in Europe.⁶²

On the fundamental issue of freedom, therefore, Solzhenitsyn the "neo-Slavophile" is in full agreement with Grossman the "Westernizer." If Solzhenitsyn does not share Grossman's view that Lenin was the logical heir of Russian history because he views Marxism as a Western creed alien to Russia's indigenous traditions, he, too, sees Peter the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 240.

⁶¹ Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, V–VII, 17. Compare the Russian text: "Ivan da za Rus Sviatuiu ostanovili nemtsa na Volge." in *Gulag Arkhipelag, 1918–1956. Opyt khudozhestvennogo isledovaniia*, V–VI–VII, in Solzhenitsyn, *Maloe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Inkom, 1991), VII, 13.

⁶² *The Gulag Archipelago*, I–II, 272.

Great's coercive revolution from above as the beginning of Russia's wrongheaded path to statist tyranny and an expansive imperialism that brought little good to the nation.⁶³ Unlike Grossman, however, Solzhenitsyn lived to spell out the political implications of this view of Russian history, forcefully bringing them out in his essay "Repentance and Self-Limitation in the Life of Nations" (1974).⁶⁴

Solzhenitsyn considered "Repentance and Self-Limitation in the Life of Nations" his most important essay, a major statement on the modern world and the perils of pursuing technological progress and political goals in the absence of moral constraints. For our purposes, however, it is Solzhenitsyn's views on the history and fate of Russia that matter most.⁶⁵ As a "neo-Slavophile," Solzhenitsyn views the nation as an organic entity, not a mere composite of individuals: nations, as much as individuals, are "vital formations, susceptible to moral feelings, including—however painful a step it might be—repentance."⁶⁶ Nations, like individuals, are susceptible to acts of "saintliness" as much as acts of "utter wickedness," and, just like individuals, they find it impossible to live "without sin." It follows from this that every nation has at one time or another "contributed its share of inhumanity, injustice, and arrogance" to the world, and thus has good reasons for repentance even when the majority of the nation might have had little control over its leaders' actions: "The nation is mystically welded together in a community of guilt, and its inescapable destiny is common repentance."⁶⁷ Willy Brandt's "Cannossa" to Warsaw, Auschwitz, and Israel is for Solzhenitsyn a paradigmatic example of such repentance for the

⁶³ Solzhenitsyn explicitly compares the calamity of collectivization with Peter the Great's enserfment of the peasantry. Also, like Grossman, he depicts the collectivization as a general rehearsal for Hitler's Holocaust of the Jews. *Ibid.*, 54–55.

⁶⁴ A. Solzhenitsyn, "Repentance and Self-Limitation in the Life of Nations," in *From under the Rubble*, ed. A. Solzhenitsyn et al. (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 1981), 105–44. This collection of dissident essays on the future of Russia was published first as *Iz-pod glyb* (Paris: YMCA-Press 1974).

⁶⁵ An excellent analysis of the broader aspects of Solzhenitsyn's essay can be found in D.J. Mahoney, *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: The Ascent from Ideology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 99–135.

⁶⁶ Solzhenitsyn, "Repentance and Self-Limitation in the Life of Nations," 109.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

sins of the nation, but so is the repentance of the nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia for the villainy of serfdom. Nevertheless, the Russians' propensity for repentance, so visible in old Muscovy, according to Solzhenitsyn, was fatally weakened by the church reform of the seventeenth century and imperial state building under Peter the Great, as testified by "the monstrous punishment" of some 12,000,000 Old Believers. Solzhenitsyn's condemnation of Russian empire-building is unconditional:

The whole Petersburg period of our history—a period of external greatness, of imperial conceit—drew the Russian spirit even farther from repentance. So far that we managed to preserve serfdom for a century or more after it had become unthinkable, keeping the greater part of our own people in a slavery which robbed them of all human dignity. So far that even the upsurge of repentance on the part of thinking society came too late to appease angry minds, but engulfed us in the clouds of a new savagery, brought a pitiless rain of vengeful blows on our heads, an unprecedented terror, and the return, after seventy years, of serfdom in a still worse form.⁶⁸

The Russian propensity for repentance, according to Solzhenitsyn, was weakened further still in the Soviet or "neo-Muscovite" period. The fact that "no country in the twentieth century has suffered like ours," with the Russians, Ukrainians, and Byelorussians taking the brunt of the carnage, does not absolve the nation from the duty of repentance: "*we, all of us, Russia herself, were the necessary accomplices.*"⁶⁹

Solzhenitsyn squarely rejects both the National Bolshevik ideology of Soviet officialdom as an attempt to whitewash the sins of the nation as well as any attempt to define "Russian" in exclusionary "blood" terms; for him, the nation is primarily a "spiritual entity" founded on an ethical idea. At the same time, Solzhenitsyn rejects those interpretations of Russian history that see communism as the logical fruition of the messianic Russian idea, for this view cannot explain why so many other peoples succumbed to the communist temptation. The only way

⁶⁸ Ibid., 116.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 119.

out for Russia, according to Solzhenitsyn, is repentance for the sins of the past and a turn “inward,” toward its own moral regeneration and development. Significantly, this repentance must include asking for “forgiveness” from nations the Russians have unduly harmed. From the long catalogue of Russian sins against others, Solzhenitsyn singles out the crimes committed against the mountain peoples of the Caucasus and Poland whose partition in 1939 was followed by the Katyn massacre and the betrayal on the Vistula—with Soviet troops watching idly as the Nazis crushed the Warsaw uprising.⁷⁰

Lest it be thought that Solzhenitsyn forgets others, it should be pointed out that in the *Gulag Archipelago* he extensively documents the persecution of all peoples from the “Soviet family of nations” from those of the Baltic states to those of the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Crimea (Tartars), as well as the Ukrainians and the small peoples of the Russian North. To be sure, Solzhenitsyn does not absolve others, including the Poles whose expansionism into Ukraine, Lithuania, and, at times, into Russia itself, he squarely condemns. Nevertheless, his message is unequivocal: while repentance must be mutual, especially in multinational states like the USSR, Yugoslavia, and Nigeria, where it offers the only hope of preventing “the fires” of mutual recrimination from “smoldering beneath the ashes and flaring up again and again,”⁷¹ it is the national duty of Russians to make the first step. Repentance, argues Solzhenitsyn, will create “the atmosphere of self-limitation” in which concentration on Russia’s own national regeneration will take precedence over wasteful and harmful imperial projects that did such damage to Russia itself: “All these world tasks, which have been of no use at all to us, have left us *tired*.”⁷²

⁷⁰ Even this, argues Solzhenitsyn, was just a continuation of Russia’s sins committed against Poland since the end of the eighteenth century. *Ibid.*, 129–30.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 134–35.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 139.

Conclusion

Solzhenitsyn's rejection of empire and his advocacy of the transformation of Russia into a national state in "Repentance and Self-Limitation in the Life of Nations" (1974) predates by sixteen years his argument for the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1990). The direct influence of his argument on the process of Soviet disintegration is hard to gauge, although it was certainly not negligible.⁷³ Nevertheless, the influence of both Solzhenitsyn's and Grossman's writings cannot be measured by such a mechanical yardstick. Many of the most prominent reformers, both in Gorbachev's leadership circle and among Russia's dissidents, were members of the Thaw generation, and were critically influenced by the literature of that period. As one of the main literary protagonists of the Thaw, the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, recalled many years later,

Gorbachev is a man of our generation. He was one of those students who crowded in to hear poetry readings and political debates of the 1950s. We poets were the first to attack Stalinism, bureaucracy, anti-Semitism, and all the restrictions in our lives. When the newspapers were still silent, literature embodied the conscience of the people. Writers and poets protected ideals and conscience like two hands protecting a candle against the wind. We began to transform those candles into big torches. The poetry of our generation was the cradle of glasnost. . . . Hidden glasnost had always existed in Russian literature, which is the literature of conscience.⁷⁴

To be sure, the subsequent life trajectories of these "children of the Twentieth Party Congress" were far from uniform. Some of them became dissidents after Brezhnev's crackdown on the intelligentsia, while others considered themselves bearers of the free spirit of the sixties generation (*shestidesiatniki*) even as they adapted to changing

⁷³ Solzhenitsyn's proposal for the dissolution of the Soviet empire, translated as *Rebuilding Russia: Reflections and Tentative Proposals* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), was published in the newspaper *Komsomolskaia pravda* and the periodical *Literaturnaia gazeta* on September 18, 1990, with a combined circulation of 25,000,000 copies.

⁷⁴ S.F. Cohen and K. vanden Heuvel, *Voices of Glasnost: Interviews with Gorbachev's Reformers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 265.

realities. A third group continued to serve “the cause of socialism,” acquiescing to political humiliation. But even many of those who remained in party, government, or academic circles during the long period of stagnation (*zastoi*), constituted elements of a potential reform constituency, as became evident during the first years of Gorbachev’s perestroika.

The idea that the Soviet empire was not worth preserving was possibly not the first one on the mind of these reformers, as few expected peripheral nationalist movements to acquire such power practically overnight. However, the symbolic legacy of imperial autocracy and Stalin’s totalitarianism that Grossman’s and Solzhenitsyn’s writings brought out so clearly, did weigh heavily on the intelligentsia, and helps explain why so many of its members viewed the emancipation of the peripheral nationalities from the grip of the oppressive Soviet state as inextricably tied to the national liberation of Russia itself. Only the continued salience of this legacy can explain why the struggle against “the imperial center” acquired such importance in the late perestroika period, and why the attempts at forceful crackdown on peripheral nationalist movements encountered such opposition in Russia itself. This is not to say that there were no intellectuals committed to the preservation of the Soviet Union and willing to go so far as to make alliances with the orthodox party elite, the military leadership, and extreme right-wing groups in order to achieve that goal. But it does mean that many among the intelligentsia were not willing to pay for state preservation at the price of repression and the espousal of a National Bolshevik Soviet-Russian nationalism with its openly anti-Semitic overtones reminiscent of Stalin’s late years.

“Without the free word, there are no free people”

Lydia Chukovskaya's Writings on Terror and Censorship

ANTONELLA D'AMELIA

A fate of death or loss of freedom marks the history of Russian culture: “Beatings, imprisonment, deportation, exile, forced labor, the gallows, the bullet of a carefree duelist—this is but a brief catalogue of the laurels crowning the head of the Russian writer.” Thus noted the exiled poet Vladislav Khodasevich in his 1932 essay, eloquently titled *Krovavaia pishcha* [Bloody food].¹ Thinking back on the ordeal suffered by written word in nineteenth-century Russia, he recalls the death sentences commuted to exile in Siberia of Alexander Radishchev and Fyodor Dostoyevsky; the deportation to Siberia of Decembrist poets’ Kondraty Ryleyev’s death sentence; the deaths of Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov, caused by courtly plotting; the isolation of Pyotr Chaadayev, declared insane because of his philosophical letters; Alexander Herzen’s exile; and many other similar incidents. In the course of the twentieth century, after the revolution, this unfinished list of tsarist cruelties was lengthened and duplicated by the killing or silencing of an equal number of writers and poets. These subsequent instances of violence included Nikolay Gumilyov’s execution and Alexander Blok’s long spiritual agony (1921), the suicides committed after much deliberation by Sergei Yesenin (1925) and Vladimir Mayakovsky (1930), Pavel Florensky’s deportation to the Solovki Islands and execution (1937), the emigration of the country’s most significant literary voices, the arrest and thirty-year intellectual isolation of the philosopher and critic Mikhail Bakhtin, the arrest and death sentences

¹ V. Khodasevich, *Literaturnye statii i vospominaniia* (New York: Izdanie im. Cechova, 1954), 285.

of Boris Pilnyak (1929), Nikolai Klyuev (1937), and Isaac Babel (1939), Osip Mandelstam's deportation and death in a transit camp (1938), Alexander Vvedensky's conviction for anti-Soviet activities (1941), Daniil Kharms's death in a psychiatric hospital (1942), Varlam Shalamov's and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's forced labor in the Gulag system, the creative silence imposed on many, and finally the "fall and demise of the Soviet intellectual."²

"Russian writers cannot escape conviction," Khodasevich observes bitterly, as he links the martyrdom of intellectuals to the "prophetic" calling of Russian literature, drawing an analogy between the prophet's clash with people and the writer's struggle with society: "In the prophet's suffering, people mystically exorcise their own pain; striking out at a prophet is a sacrificial act."³

The indomitable Lydia Chukovskaya⁴ stands out among the ranks of those authors who were not physically eliminated. The daughter of the famous writer, translator, and literary critic Korney Chukovsky (1882–1969), between 1928 and 1937, she worked, successfully, as an editor for the children's book publisher Detizdat, in Leningrad, directed by the writer Samuil Marshak. In August 1937, after her husband, the renowned astrophysicist Matvei Petrovich Bronstein, was arrested, she was charged with sabotage, included in the list of "enemies of

² This is the title of Arkadiy Belinkov's monograph devoted to Yuri Olesha: "Sdachia i gibel sovetskogo intelligenta." In a 1930 essay written shortly after Mayakovsky's death, Roman Jakobson also provides the martyrology of early twentieth-century Russian poets; see R. Jakobson, "On a Generation That Squandered Its Poets," in *Twentieth Century Russian Literary Criticism*, ed. V. Erlich (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 138–66.

³ Khodasevich, *Literaturnye stat'i i vospominaniia*, 290–91.

⁴ On Lydia Chukovskaya's literary activity, see B. Holmgren, *Women's Work in Stalin's Time: On Lidiia Chukovskaia and Nadezhda Mandelstam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); A. Julius, *Lidija Cukovskaja: Leven und Werk* (Munich: O. Sagner, 1995); S. Pratt, "Angels in the Stalinist House: Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, Lidiia Chukovskaia, Lidiia Ginzburg, and Russian Women's Autobiography," in *Engendering Slavic Literatures*, ed. P. Chester and S. Forrester (Bloomington-Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 158–73. In addition to a two-volume collection of her work, see her correspondence with her father: K. Chukovsky and L. Chukovskaya, *Perepiska 1912–1969* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2004), and with the poet David Samoilov (D. Samoilov and L. Chukovskaya, *Perepiska 1912–1969* [Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2004]).

the people," and fired. However, having left Leningrad for a time, she was spared the arrest that awaited the family members of those under investigation and the subsequent repression that crushed her publishing house, whose other members, for the most part, disappeared in concentration camps. In the years that followed the denunciation of Stalin's crimes and during the Thaw, Chukovskaya resumed her place in the literary scene. She struggled in vain to publish her novella *Sofia Petrovna* (a brave testimony to the years of the Great Terror that affected Soviet society after Kirov's murder), put tremendous effort into exposing the guilty silences and omissions of official history,⁵ and repeatedly took a public stand by putting out courageous pamphlets, essays and articles in which she denounced the false charges and attacks of the press against dissidents. In 1966, she addressed an open letter "To Mikhail Sholokhov, author of *Quietly Flows the Don*," in which she chastised him for taking part in the 23rd congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) against the writers Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel, and reminded him that a writer's duty is "not to persecute, but to defend," as taught by the great tradition of Russian literature, from Alexander Pushkin to Anton Chekhov: "A literary work—whether weak or powerful, false or true, exceptional or mediocre—is an expression of collective thought, and it must not be judged by a criminal or military court, but only by society and literature. Writers, like all other Soviet citizens, can and must be judged before a court of law for their crimes, but not for their books. Literature is not subject to criminal law. Ideas must be countered by other ideas, not by jail or concentration camps."⁶

Gradually pushed away from the intellectual scene (until she was finally expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers in 1974), Chukovskaya joined the ranks of those who circulated their ideas through samizdat, becoming a dissident writer, a voice raised against the regime, a part of her country's critical conscience. After the 20th congress of the CPSU,

⁵ On Brezhnev's years of lead, see M. Ferretti, *La memoria mutilata. La Russia ricorda* (Milan: Corbaccio, 1993), particularly 112–39; and G. Svirski, *Écrivains de la liberté. La résistance littéraire en Union Soviétique depuis la guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979).

⁶ L. Chukovskaya, "Mikhailu Sholokhovu, avtoru Tikhogo Dona," in *Sochineniia v 2-kh tomakh* (Moscow: Art-Fleks, 2001), vol. II, 511.

her work was nothing but an indomitable battle for the freedom of speech, against silence and “the process of obliteration of memory.”⁷ Through open letters and writings—disseminated clandestinely, for their publication was never authorized—she fought attempts to excise Russian history from people’s memory.

Drawing inspiration from the tradition of the nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia, and particularly from Alexander Herzen’s words in his essay “O razvitií revoliutsionnykh idei v Rossii” (On the Evolution of Revolutionary Ideas in Russia)—“Things one does not dare to say only half-exist”⁸—Chukovskaya reiterates that word is action, and that Russian intellectuals must fight with the weapon of words. They must piece together the fragments of their history, resume their role as bearers and promoters of critical conscience, and lay claim to the right to remember: “Culture is the solidified trace of human spirit’s noble impulses, which intertwine and open new paths to the future. Fearless memory cherishes these traces, and defends them—sometimes from vacuity and indifference, sometimes from impudence and violence. I believe it is also necessary to preserve the traces of impudence and violence. (Otherwise it won’t be understood that culture is not only hard work, but also a struggle.)”⁹

A century after Herzen drove the message home in *Kolokol* (1868), Chukovskaya made it current in her 1968 article addressed to the newspaper *Izvestia* on the fifteenth anniversary of Stalin’s death, titled “Ne kazn, no mysl, no slovo” (Not execution, but thought and words): “Without the free word, there are no free people; without the independent word, there can be no great nation capable of internal change.”¹⁰

Silence is synonymous to subjection, to enslavement. Silence keeps despotism alive. While less conspicuous, the censorship of the 1960s was actually stronger, and more ubiquitous than before, pursuing the “eradication of memory,” the obliteration of the fate to which millions

⁷ L. Chukovskaya, *Protsess iskliuchenii. Ocherk literaturnykh npravov* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2007), 327.

⁸ A.I. Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenii v 30-ti tomakh* (Moscow: Akademiia Nauk, 1954–66), vol. VII, 214.

⁹ Chukovskaya, *Protsess iskliucheniia*, 361.

¹⁰ Chukovskaya, *Sochineniia v 2-kh tomakh*, vol. II, 518.

of citizens were doomed, more subtly than in the past. Exposing the return to Stalinist tendencies in post-Khrushchev Russia, the writer appeals to Soviet society and urges it to break the silence and to fight against every attack on freedom of thought and speech, as well as against any attempt to annihilate history:

Bolt by bolt, I want an examination made of the machine that transformed man, once full of life, industrious, into a cold corpse. I want a sentence against it to be pronounced, with full voice. . . . This is the main task today, and it is an urgent task that cannot be postponed. We must encourage everyone, old and young, to be brave and become aware of the past. Then, the path leading into the future will also be clear. Current trials against speech wouldn't have seen the light of day, if this task had been carried out when it should have.¹¹

Word protects from the omissions of history, under the exclusive control of Soviet power. It rescues society from the amnesia to which it was condemned for too long: "a truthful word is invincible, and even if it is defeated, it is defeated only for a short time,"¹² writes Chukovskaya. The power of word prevails over violence:

Words—the sanctuary of the soul—cannot be commanded. Through words, you can charm, soothe, rejoice, unmask, or worry. Words cannot be commanded. You can command only through hindrances to words, impediments to words, barriers to words. A book may be removed from a program, or a library; its proofs may be destroyed, and it may not be published; its author may be expelled from the Writers' Union. . . . This is what you have control over. Thwarting. Obstructing. Forbidding. But "words are the sanctuary of the soul. Words alone make the world go round." Even you are powerless to stand in their way.¹³

In her novella *Sofia Petrovna*, Lydia Chukovskaya—a fine-tuned seismograph of her time—records a revealing tale on the years of the Great Terror, characterized by an "intentionally warped reality," which deforms historical events and, more importantly, human feelings. As commented by Chukovskaya herself in 1974, *Sofia Petrovna*

¹¹ Ivi, 516.

¹² Chukovskaya, *Protsess iskliucheniia*, 396.

¹³ Ivi, 394–95.

is a tale on the year 1937, written in the winter between 1939 and 1940, immediately after lining up in front of the prison for two years. It's not for me to appraise its artistic worth, but its value as a truthful testimony is undeniable. To this day (1974), I don't know of any prose text on 1937, written *here and now*. . . . In my tale, I tried to represent the degree to which a society can become intoxicated by lies, which is comparable only to that experienced by an army exposed to toxic gases. As a main character I did not choose a sister, a wife, a lover, or even a friend, but the emblem of fidelity: a mother. My Sofia Petrovna loses her only son. In an intentionally warped reality, all feelings are out of kilter, including maternal feelings—that's my idea.¹⁴

Sofia Petrovna is an account-testimony, an eyewitness's emblematic retelling of the Yezhov years.¹⁵ It is a chronicle of the social anesthesia that affected the Russian population, its loss of sensitivity to repression and injustice, and its yielding to a torpor induced by the official, oleographic image flaunted by those in power.¹⁶ The writer's objective is to focus on the senselessness of all that happened, and especially on the population's blind and lasting faith in Soviet power: "In our country, people don't go to prison without reason" is the tale's leitmotif.¹⁷

Sofia Petrovna's character helps readers understand how Soviet society reacted to the mass arrests of 1937. The novella's protagonist is a simple Leningrad typist, "a woman with narrow views and few interests; what occurs around her doesn't concern her; she's an ideal citizen in a state where things happen that are incomprehensible to her,"¹⁸ and she accepts all that takes place with absolute indifference.

¹⁴ Ibid., 317.

¹⁵ "Sofia Petrovna is not an anti-utopia, but a picture from life, written in 1939 not only at the risk of life, but also with suicidal audacity." S.A. Lur'e, *Kto byl on, i byla ona*, in Chukovsky and Chukovskaya, *Perepiska*, 5.

¹⁶ See B. Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); G.P. Piretto, *Gli occhi di Stalin: La cultura visuale sovietica nell'era staliniana* (Milan: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2010).

¹⁷ See M. Geller, *Koncentracionnyi mir i sovetskaia literatura* (London: Overseas Publications Interchange, 1974), 190–91.

¹⁸ A. Salomoni, "Per una ricerca su 'verità' e 'giustizia.' L'esperienza di Lidija Cukovskaja," *D.E.P. Deportate, esuli, profughe. Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile*, no.

In the habit of believing newspapers and authorities more than herself, Sofia Petrovna accepts the prosecutor's account that her son "confessed his crimes" and deserves to be sentenced to ten years in the camps. With merciless logic and unyielding consistency, the tale develops the mother's gradual estrangement from her son, which started when she accepted the accusations published in the papers and voiced in official meetings.¹⁹ While her son's friends do not believe he is guilty, she is paralyzed by terror, and by faith in the superior necessity of all that is happening:

In her heart, Sofia Petrovna knows very well that Kolya has never committed and could not have committed any crime, that he is entirely loyal to the party, to the factory, and to the comrade Stalin himself. But if she were to believe herself and not the prosecutor, or the papers, then . . . Then . . . The world would come crumbling down, the ground would sink beneath her feet, and the peace of mind it was so comfortable for her to live, work and prosper in would go up in smoke. . . . And so Sofia Petrovna tries as hard as she can to believe *at once* both the prosecutor and her son, and in so doing goes crazy.²⁰

The split in Sofia Petrovna's personality deepens over the course of the narrative. The author describes it in great detail, and brings the story to an end by portraying the mother's symbolic gesture of burning, furtively, the letter in which her son asks her to help him expose the tortures he is inflicted and the injustice of his arrest. As counterpart to this suffering mother, who loses her mind and betrays her son because contemporary society has gradually prepared her to treachery and subjugated her with its falsehoods ("In our country, people don't go to prison without reason"), the image of a motherland who slaughters her own children emerges cruelly throughout the text.²¹

7 (2007): 36. See also E. Magnanini, "Dall'altra parte dell'inferno," in *Deportazione e memorie femminili (1899–1953)*, ed. B. Bianchi (Milan: Unicopli, 2002).

¹⁹ Geller, *Kontsentratsionnyi mir i sovetskaia literatura*, 192.

²⁰ Chukovskaya, *Protseks iskliucheniia*, 317–18.

²¹ Geller, *Kontsentratsionnyi mir i sovetskaia literatura*, 193. On the 1930s and literature, see R. Conquest, *Inside Stalin's Secret Police: NKVD Politics, 1936–39* (London: Macmillan,

Unlike the many accounts of the events of the Great Terror written many years later in retrospect—in large part during the “thaw,” when denouncing Stalin’s crimes was not only allowed, but also encouraged by political authorities, who hoped to reassure the Soviet population that those years were finally over—*Sofia Petrovna* was written while the tragedy was still unfolding.²² These were the years in which Lydia Chukovskaya struggled to get news of her husband, arrested in 1937 and sentenced “to ten years of imprisonment in the Gulag without the right of correspondence” (a cruel euphemism for a death sentence). Indeed, in the Yezhov years, the writer was among the many people who suffered the tragedy of being thrown into the meat grinder of the Great Terror, which in her case involved an arrest in the middle of the night, three house searches, and the long queues in front of the prison described by Anna Akhmatova in her lyrical cycle *Requiem*, the expression of an entire population’s collective martyrdom, the portrayal of an “innocent Russia writhed under bloody boots”: “In the fearful years of the Yezhov terror I spent seventeen months in prison queues in Leningrad. One day somebody ‘identified’ me. Beside me, in the queue, there was a woman with blue lips. She had, of course, never heard of me; but she suddenly came out of that trance so common to us all and whispered in my ear (everybody spoke in whispers there): ‘Can you describe this?’ And I said: ‘Yes, I can.’ And then something like the shadow of a smile crossed what had once been her face.”²³

1985); M. Heller and A. Nekrich, *Utopia in Power* (New York: Summit Books, 1986); N. Marie-Schwarzenberg, *Le KGB (des origines a nos jours)* (Paris: PUF, 1993).

²² Though aware that she wouldn’t be able to publish it, Chukovskaya started drafting *Sofia Petrovna* in 1939 and finished the book in February 1940. The text, preserved in a single copy, was entrusted to one of the author’s friends; after the latter died in the Leningrad siege, the book was placed in the custody of his relatives. Following the 20th congress of the CPSU, in 1962, the author offered Sovetsky Pisatel of Leningrad to publish *Sofia Petrovna*. The publishing house agreed at first, but then pulled out. The novella was released in 1965, in Paris, with a different title, *Opustelyi dom*, and a few changes; a year later it was published in full, under its original title, in the magazine *Novyi Zhurnal* of New York. After circulating at length in typewritten form, it was finally published in Russia—some fifty years after it was first penned—on the magazine *Neva*, no. 2, 1988, during Gorbachev’s perestroika.

²³ A. Akhmatova, *Requiem and Poem without a Hero*, trans. D.M. Thomas (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976), 23.

Innumerable details of that terrible era appear in *Sofia Petrovna*: the portrayal of politicians preoccupied with party deviations and enemy infiltrations; the depiction of all-night queues in front of the prison; the image of a city "particularly well suited to catastrophes"—as noted by Akhmatova—with its "cold river, over which there are heavy clouds," its "menacing sunsets," and its "operatic, terrifying moon"; and, first and foremost, the image of a city paralyzed by terror.²⁴ The portrait of Sofia Petrovna thus becomes the emblem of a maddened, overwhelmed society deprived of a personal life, sucked into a dark abyss, where husbands, children, and relations disappear without leaving any trace.

To the author, Sofia Petrovna is not a "lyrical heroine," but "The generalized image of those who seriously believed in the reasonableness and legitimacy of what was happening: 'In our country, people don't go to prison without reason.' If you lose this conviction, there is no salvation."²⁵

An identical reaction—the certainty that Soviet power could not make mistakes—emerges from the pages of Yulia Pyatnitskaya's *Dnevnik zheny bolshevik* (*Diary of a Bolshevik's Wife*),²⁶ the Italian translation of which was edited and prefaced by Victor Zaslavsky for the Liberal book series. The wife of an old Bolshevik and Comintern member, Pyatnitskaya sways between her faith in the radiant future of the revolution and her love for her husband, takes pleasure in the proletarian dictatorship's striking down on enemies ("worms"), but ends up suspecting that her own husband might be a traitor of the people, and feeling that NKVD representatives are "the ones closest to her." As noted by Zaslavsky, the historical meaning of the *Diary* resides precisely "in the double perspective from which the author sees and gauges events," as well as "in her double role of victim and executioner. . . . The Diary, regardless of the author's intentions, highlights a historical paradox: the messianic collectivist ideology (which glorified

²⁴ *The Akhmatova Journals*, vol. I: 1938–1941, trans. Milena Michalski and Sylva Rubashova; poetry translated by P. Norman (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1994), 40. The text was published in Russia only in 1989.

²⁵ Chukovskaya, *Protsess isklucheniia*, 318.

²⁶ Yu. Pyatnitskaya, *The Diary of a Bolshevik's Wife* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

the will of the masses, proclaimed popular welfare as the supreme good, and aimed to arrive at the perfect society, in which the noble ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity would be fully realized) in fact produced almost complete social atomization and destroyed every community, every human aggregation not sanctioned or mediated by the party-state.”²⁷

A wall of fear came up, separating each person from the others who were suffering through the same tragedy. The inability to “see” reality paralyzed Sofia Petrovna, as it did a large part of society in those years. Intellectuals themselves, whose mission it was, according to Russian tradition, to defend ethical norms, were crushed beneath their desire to be one with their time, “the new era,” and succumbed to lethargy, and to the hypnosis of official propaganda.²⁸

The only lyrical voice raised to break the silence belonged to Anna Akhmatova, who fashions her personal suffering into the collective epic of an entire nation. In *Requiem*, Akhmatova articulates the tragedy of “a people of hundreds of millions,” and turns the wretched women who would stand in line with her, waiting for the prison doors to open, into the co-protagonists of her poem:

Rising as though for early mass,
Through the capital of beasts we’d thread.
Met, more breathless than the dead.²⁹

Unlike Sofia Petrovna, Akhmatova never wavers. She is certain of her son’s innocence and of the innocence of those who, like him, are being detained. She fights with courage against the sentence pronounced against him.³⁰ In her entries on the meetings she had with Anna

²⁷ V. Zaslavsky, “Una testimonianza del Grande Terrore,” in J. Pyatnizkaya, *Diario della moglie di un bolscevico* (Florence: Liberal Libri, 2000), XXII, XXVIII.

²⁸ G. Nivat, *Vers la fin du mythe russe: Essais sur la culture russe de Gogol à nos jours* (Lausanne: L’Age d’homme, 1982), 197.

²⁹ Akhmatova, *Requiem*, 24.

³⁰ After being arrested for a short time in 1935, Lev Gumilev, Anna Akhmatova’s son, was arrested for a second time and sentenced to death in March 1938. This sentence was later commuted to deportation. As she awaited the verdict, each day she would go to the Kresty (Crosses) prison in Leningrad, sharing the fate of countless relatives

Akhmatova, Lydia Chukovskaya recalls how they would often ask one another what the reasons might be for those events, and discuss the senseless tortures inflicted on the entire country. She also recalls the meeting of February 4, 1940, when she read her novella to Akhmatova:

I read for a long time and, all the time while reading, I felt ashamed of my bad prose. To read it to her! What made me do it? But there was nothing I could do now, so I read on.

For the first half, I got the impression that she was bored.

I took a break, and we drank some tea.

She listened to the second half intently, with undivided attention and, it seemed to me, great emotion. At one point she even wiped away a tear, I think. I wasn't sure of it, however, as I read not raising my eyes.

All this lasted an eternity. What a long story!

When I finished she said: "This is very good. Every word is true."³¹

Chukovskaya's *Notes on Anna Akhmatova* hold great literary value. They form an unusual kind of diary ("could one even conceive of keeping a real diary in those days,")³² in which the author recorded, briefly and allusively, her conversations with Akhmatova between 1938 and 1966:

My entries on the Terror, incidentally, are notable in that the only things which are fully reproduced are dreams. Reality was beyond my powers of description; moreover, I did not even attempt to describe it in my diary. It could not have been captured in a diary, and anyway could one even conceive of keeping a real diary in those days? The content of our conversations, whispers, guesses, silences of that time is scrupulously absent from these notes. The content of my days—which I sometimes spent doing occasional work (I had been sacked from my full-time job in '37), but most often in queues to various representatives

of detainees, standing "parcel in hand, beneath the Crosses, three hundredth in line, burning the new year's ice with your hot tears" (*Requiem*).

³¹ *The Akhmatova Journals*, 58–59.

³² *The Akhmatova Journals*, 5. See also V. Garros, N. Korenevskaya, and T. Lahusen, eds., *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s* (New York: New Press, 1995); J. Hellbeck and K. Heller, eds., *Autobiographical Practices in Russia* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2004); J. Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

of Pyotr Ivanych, in Leningrad or Moscow, or writing letters and petitions, or meeting Mitya's colleagues, scholars and writers, who tried to intercede for him—in other words, real life, my daily life, has been omitted from my notes, or almost omitted; just faint glimmers of it, here and there.³³

During their frequent meetings, Akhmatova recited her verses, and Chukovskaya committed them to memory, for fear that the political police might confiscate their transcription.

Suddenly, in mid-conversation, she would fall silent and, signalling to me with her eyes at the ceiling and walls, she would get a scrap of paper and a pencil; then she would loudly say something very mundane: "Would you like some tea?" or "You're very tanned," then she would cover the scrap in hurried handwriting and pass it to me. I would read the poems and, having memorized them, would hand them back to her in silence. "How early autumn came this year," Anna Andreevna would say loudly and, striking a match, would bum the paper over an ashtray.

It was a ritual: hands, match, ashtray—a beautiful and mournful ritual.³⁴

By recording her conversations with Akhmatova to preserve the memory of the latter's personality and ethical choices, Chukovskaya also aimed to safeguard the traces of that era of cruelty and lies, even as she was forced to omit the very core of their discussions (her own undertakings in behalf of her husband, Akhmatova's in behalf of her son, any news on these issues or on "the night's dead"). In her introduction, Chukovskaya writes: "The literary conversations in my diary illicitly crept into the foreground: in reality the names Ezhov, Stalin, Vyshinsky and words such as 'died,' 'shot,' 'banished,' 'queue,' 'search,' and so on, came up in our conversations no less frequently than discussions about books and paintings. . . . I assiduously omitted the names of the masters of the torture chambers."³⁵

³³ *The Akhmatova Journals*, 5. Petr Ivanych was the name commonly used to refer to the NKVD, the secret police.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

In her articles of the 1970s—"Gnev naroda" (The anger of the people), "Otvettstvennost pisatel'ia i bezotvetstvennost *Literaturnoi gazety*" (The responsibility of the writer and the irresponsibility of the *Literaturnaya Gazeta*), "Proryv nemoty" (A breach in the silence)—Chukovskaya bravely defends dissidents (Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov, Brodsky), denouncing the persecutions and defamation inflicted upon them, the dishonest and intentional misinformation put out to confound readers, the "impenetrable wall" of lies built between them and the population, a concrete barrier more solid than the Berlin Wall. "There are written and unwritten laws. In our country, there is an unwritten law that prevails over the written code. . . . There is but one crime for which authorities never pardon anyone. According to this single, strictly enforced law, every man must be harshly punished for the slightest attempt to think for himself. To think aloud . . . Searches and arrests are currently taking place everywhere—from the Black Sea to the White Sea . . . Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Odessa. In psychiatric hospitals, people of sound mind lose their sanity."³⁶

In the landscape of Soviet literature, Lydia Chukovskaya is mostly remembered as a literary critic. Yet, throughout the post-Stalinist period, her activities in favor of freedom of thought and expression, and her fight against the Soviet regime, which periodically resorted to historical falsification and the "eradication of memory" as means to subjugate the consciences of its citizens, were very effective. The protagonist of Vasily Grossman's *Everything Flows* also reflects on the dehumanized, enslaved existence of society in the Brezhnev years: "Visible and invisible ties had been broken—broken by time, by the mass deportations after the assassination of Kirov, by the snows and dust of Kazakhstan, by the devastating years of the Siege. . . . Barbed wire, it seemed, was no longer necessary; life outside the barbed wire had become, in its essence, no different from that of the barracks. . . . What he observed now was the same pitiful weakness, the same cruelty, the same greed and the same terror that he had seen in the camps."³⁷

In 1974, after writing her essay "The anger of the people," Lydia Chukovskaya was expelled by a unanimous vote from the Soviet

³⁶ Chukovskaya, "Gnev naroda," in *Sochineniia v 2-kh tomakh*, vol. II, 530.

³⁷ V. Grossman, *Everything Flows* (London: Harvill Secker, 2010), 56–57, 93.

Writers' Union. This measure doomed her to "nonexistence" as a writer, for literary periodicals and publishing houses depended on this official organization. (She was later readmitted into the union's ranks, once again by a unanimous vote, in February 1989.)

In addition to political journalism and denunciation activities, Chukovskaya devoted her final years to writing *Procherk* (A stroke of the pen). This was a peculiar autobiographical text, focusing on her recollections of her husband and of their life together. She started work on it in 1980 and continued until her death, in February 1996.

Procherk is an unfinished story. Indeed, the mass of new documents that emerged from the Cheka/NKVD/KGB secret archives in the 1990s compelled the author to rework it several times.³⁸ Its final draft comprises eighteen chapters, which cover the author's childhood, her work as an editor, and the life she shared with her husband, who was executed on February 18, 1938, a few months after his arrest.

The title refers to the impersonal mark—a long stroke of the pen—where the cause and place of death should have been provided on his death certificate, which she obtained in 1957, after years of legal battles.

The entire story is centered on Matvei Petrovich, whose life is told with terse brevity and "assembled" with the events of the time, with documentary data collected over the years, and with his cellmates' testimonies and letters. The author's emblematic experience as the widow of an executed detainee, a fate shared by millions of Russian women in those years, emerges alongside his. In her opening words to the work, the author confesses her intentions.

I started writing this book with no artistic goal in mind—particularly, no defined goal. The result is not an article, a short story, a lyric poem, or a piece of political journalism. . . . So what is it? A collection of memories? Perhaps. I simply wanted to recall and write down all I knew about my husband, the theoretical physicist Matvei Petrovich Bronshtein, who perished in 1937.

However, as soon as I had a pen in my hand, I realized that "simply" is all but simple. Anna Akhmatova used to say: "you mustn't write memories of someone you know little about, someone who isn't close by, or

³⁸ Chukovskaya, "Ot sostavitelia," in *Sochineniia v 2-kh tomakh*, vol. I, 5.

something you only know from a distance." She was probably right, but even portraying those you know well is a difficult task—for the opposite reason. They're too close; you can touch them, but you cannot represent them. They invade your space, encircle you, and crush you. It is particularly hard if you write after decades. And that's not because time has erased their features from your memory. On the contrary, the dead differ from the living in that they never die. They are always with us. As the years go by, they move to deeper and deeper chambers of our hearts. Looking back, you convince yourself that the one you've lost eludes portrayal because he's become indivisible from you—he has grown with you. The two of you have become indistinguishable. Over the years, he has grown so much in your memory that you can no longer distinguish your contours from his. And this baffles you, for in life you were not so much alike. And yet the years of detachment, when memory was tirelessly working within you, have reaped their fruits. When you try to remember him, without fail you remember yourself. Looking in the distance, straining your gaze to make him out, to remember him, to represent him, you come upon your own life. I want to write about Mitja, but I end up writing about myself. I want to write about him, but instead I write about others. Readers expecting coherent recollections titled "Matvei Petrovich Bronstein" will be disappointed. I have no right to use his name for my work. I remember myself with him, him with me, I remember my memory of him, but not Bronstein alone.³⁹

As in *Sofia Petrovna*, here too the events of the Yezhov years are recounted in precise detail, in a savvy mix of biography and history. The most painful moments are evoked with bitterness and restraint. The description of the "marriage with the deceased," which entitled the author to preserve her husband's work and inquire about him, is particularly terse, and respectful of those who endured the same fate: "When Matvei Petrovich was no longer living, it fell to me to fill out the forms." This description casts light on another cruel reality of the rehabilitation period, when—to contain the huge number of inquiries on the people who had disappeared—the legal system imposed that marriage certificates be presented before it would disclose what had

³⁹ Chukovskaya, "Procherk," in *Sochineniia v 2-kh tomakh*, vol. I, 19–20.

happened to those unjustly accused and killed, thus rescuing them from silence. “I don’t know what shocked me more in 1937, power’s ferocity or human stupidity,” the writer commented. Her recourse to writing stemmed from her need to counteract the denial of terror. Describing what had happened was the only way to prevent those terrible years from being blotted out, to understand the causes of the blindness she perceived around herself, and to pass on a history that had systematically been denied: “This is the main task today, and it is an urgent task that cannot be postponed. We must encourage everyone, old and young, to be brave and become aware of the past.”⁴⁰

Lydia Chukovskaya’s autobiographical writings and her essays were deeply affected by the work of Alexander Herzen, whom Isaiah Berlin defined “the most arresting Russian political writer in the nineteenth century.”⁴¹ They were modeled particularly on *Byloe i dumy* (*My Past and Thoughts*), the reference text for many intellectuals of the post-Stalinist period.⁴² Like Herzen, Chukovskaya leaves a clear sign of her choice as an author. She writes about herself and about her time, favoring the genre based on autobiographical notes (*zapiski*). Here, fragmentary recollections or dim traces of memory elicit awareness of one’s duty in society and point to the importance of memoirs as authentic historical documents, as meaningful signs of an era. Herzen himself characterized his autobiographical writing in *Byloe i dumy* as *zapiski*. In this work, the emotional opening biographical sections (the first four parts can be read as a coming-of-age story) are followed by sections in which the understanding of maturity, and the awareness of the historical, social, and political role the author played in Russian and European affairs, are given greater prominence.

In his foreword to the fifth part of this work, Herzen uses a metaphor linked to his life path—“My Past and Thoughts is not a historical

⁴⁰ Chukovskaya, *Sochineniia v 2-kh tomakh*, vol. II, 516.

⁴¹ I. Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, ed. H. Hardy and A. Kelly (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), 186.

⁴² See I. Paperno, “Sovetskii opyt, avtobiograficheskoe pismo i istoricheskoe soznanie: Ginzburg, Gercen, Gegel,” *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* 68 (2004), 102–3. Among others, Irina Paperno recalls the memoirs of poets Pavel Antokolsky and David Samoilov, and of writers Lydia Ginzburg and Ruf Zernova.

monograph but the reflection of history in someone who accidentally got in its way"⁴³—suggesting that the text be read as a peculiar blend of history, autobiography, and memoir. Chukovskaya interpreted it thus in her monograph (1966), calling it both a "historical chronicle" and a "message Herzen sent into the future," and later drawing on the author's metaphor in her observation "on the wheels of history, whose movement Herzen has always perceived in his life path."⁴⁴ The same fusion of history and personal life, of political theme and individual drama that characterized Herzen's narrative also shapes Lydia Chukovskaya's writings, particularly *Notes on Anna Akhmatova* and *A Stroke of the Pen*. These are extraordinary collages of everyday events and historical documents, fragments of life with echoes of the past, a warning to future generations against oblivion, a monument to memory and the free word.

⁴³ A. Herzen, *Il passato e i pensieri*, ed. L. Wainstein (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), 673.

⁴⁴ Chukovskaya, "Byloe i dumy" Gertsena (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1966), 181.

The Transition from Totalitarianism to Authoritarianism in Russia

LEV GUDKOV

It is an acknowledged fact that most research on totalitarian systems focuses on the period between the 1930s and the 1960s. During this time, “typical” totalitarian systems—which may be described in an entirely satisfactory way with the “totalitarian syndrome” theoretical framework put forward by Friedrich and Brzezinski in the mid-1950s—hit their stride.¹ Authors usually deal with the formation and with the institutional features of the fascist state in Italy, of Nazism in Germany, and of the Soviet system in the USSR. For the most part, such research is conducted by historians, who insert ready-made structures and concepts from political and sociological studies into their system, in order to combine or systematize the vast empirical material at their disposal.

Military defeat resulted in the dissolution of the Fascist and Nazi regimes. As for the Soviet Union, the generic concept of totalitarianism is made more comprehensive and precise by the thesis of the functional specificity of its regime—the regime pursued the task of forced modernization, for which it created a closed and repressive society “of a military-industrial nature,” and used the perception of an ongoing conflict with the rest of the world and of the constant threat of aggression from without.

The above interpretation allows us to understand why historians rapidly lost interest in the theory of totalitarianism once the USSR collapsed. The end of the Soviet Union (ascribable either to the depletion of the internal resources of the regime, drained by the arms race that

¹ C.J. Friedrich and Z. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

brought the country to its knees economically and eroded the masses' support for those in power, or to the failure of socialist economic planning, to its inability to promote development and technological innovation) makes historians view the future of totalitarian regimes as a secondary matter, or even as a moot point. Historians' task concerning the study of totalitarianism appears to have been completed. The duty is passed on to applied political studies, which are expected to elaborate political solutions for the integration of posttotalitarian societies into the sphere of contemporary democracies. The potential of the theory of totalitarianism would therefore appear to have been exhausted.

Narrowing the thematic and historical limits of research to this extent, in my opinion, significantly diminishes the heuristic and interpretative potential of the concept of totalitarianism as an interdisciplinary methodological tool for the comparative analysis of repressive systems based on the fusion of the dominant party and the state apparatus, that is of "society-state" models.

In this way, all "extra-European" communist and national socialist regimes—such as those in power in China, Vietnam, North Korea, and Cuba—are excluded from analysis. The same fate befalls a number of transitional or mixed systems, including repressive forms of government with a strong party-state ideology, in the Middle East and in Africa (in Iraq, Iran, and other countries). Further, by focusing attention exclusively on the various aspects of the rise and functioning of Nazi-Fascism and Stalinism, research is at risk of failing to consider the matters of the future and evolution of totalitarian regimes, as well as the analysis of the lines of development of the sundry institutions that exist within them. This second issue, I believe, is even more important than the need to broaden the typological scope of the forms of totalitarianism analyzed.

The clear failure of democratization processes in the states born on the ruins of the Soviet system suggests that it may be premature to abandon the concept of totalitarianism. What recently transpired in these regions warrants an unequivocal explanation. Rather than starting from scratch, the latter ought to advance existing theoretical elaborations, proceeding down the path opened by them. A theory of

totalitarianism that can explain the reasons for the decomposition and degeneration of repressive totalitarian systems—and, by the same logic, that can define their prospects of transformation—must be developed.

Analyses of the reasons for the demise of the socialist system usually only examine, from a historical point of view, the politics of Gorbachev and of his Western and Eastern partners, and the role of social movement activists and anticommunist organizations. They then move on to predict and describe various transition scenarios for Eastern Europe, and to consider the questions pertinent to the integration of Central and Eastern European countries into the European Union. In fact, the prevalence of transitional approaches and relative democratization models often impedes the understanding of the processes underway in the post-Soviet space. The study of these cases ends up being reduced to the mere statement of their deviation from a theoretical schema. In the short run, these transitional approaches will likely prove unproductive or reductive even with regard to the events that lie ahead in countries such as China and Vietnam.

Conversely, the merits of the concept of totalitarianism rest on its systematic nature, which compels analysts to examine the interaction between institutions, and to contrast and compare the characteristics of their functioning in the various countries investigated. As Victor Zaslavsky put it, “The course of studies that currently holds the most promise is the one that does not only identify and analyze the more meaningful traits, features and institutions of totalitarian regimes, but describes them systematically and interprets them as a totality of interconnected and interdependent institutions, which may be analyzed with regard to their necessity and sufficiency for the reproduction of the totalitarian system.”² In the statement above, special attention must be paid to the words “necessity *for the reproduction* of the totalitarian system.”

It is precisely thanks to this methodological premise—the consideration of the various types of totalitarian regimes starting from the

² V. Zaslavsky, “Post-sovetskii etap izucheniia totalitarizma: novye napravleniia i metodologicheskie tendentsii,” *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia: ekonomicheskie i sotsialnye peremeny*, no. 1 (2002): 47.

point of view or logic of their reproducibility and, hence, from the need to describe their development toward the conservation or dissolution (that is, the structural differentiation) of the previous system of relations of supremacy, integration, or social control—that Zaslavsky can speak of the birth of a new phase for these kinds of studies.³

In fact, this occurred for several reasons. The primary objective of these new studies has been to define, following the logic of totalitarian regimes' dissolution, the vehicles for the institutional changes that took place. This would provide answers to questions of general interest, and explain why the shift happens relatively fluidly in some cases, whereas in others the transformation processes affecting totalitarian institutions fail to develop past the initial stage and societies incur a series of lasting crises, which favor the onset of new repressive regimes.

In the post-Soviet area, events have provided examples of both variants. There have been cases of effective Westernization with the introduction of democracy and others in which totalitarian systems have drifted toward authoritarianism, or toward traditional kinds of semi-totalitarian rule.

Generally, this return to repressive or antidemocratic regimes follows an early period of liberalization and democratic transformation (as in Belarus, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and other former Soviet republics of Central Asia). This happened in Russia. Ukraine between the elections of 2010 and until the 2014 Maidan too had seen a resurgence of the conservative nomenklatura, in the form of the Yanukovich regime.

Thus, the semantic concept of "totalitarian syndrome" retains its theoretical value and efficacy, allowing a number of matters to be defined: the cause-and-effect relationship between the end of mass terror and phenomena of "sclerosis" of society; the suspension of political turnover; the interruption of vertical mobility; the gradual replacement of missionary and expansionist ideology by conservative ideology (embodied by the rhetoric of "stability" and "order," but also

³ According to Zaslavsky, who underlines the importance of this new methodological approach, "the analysis of the functioning and degeneration of Soviet-like regimes has become the main line of research of contemporary studies on totalitarianism." *Ibid.*, 49.

by various kinds of nationalisms, which invariably produce a latent decentralization of the rule of the imperial system); the increase in the demands of regional and ethnic elites; and the consequent disintegration of the Soviet empire.⁴ On the contrary, if they are not traced back to the concept of totalitarianism, these phenomena seem like unrelated events and trends.

Let us try to observe the processes that happened in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet system from this perspective.

The Beginning of the Transition

Russian political commentators and a large part of their Western peers share the belief that Russian society is in the midst of an unfinished post-Communist transition. According to these scholars, therefore, the facts that transpired in August 1991 ought to be viewed as a kind of “revolution.”⁵ I consider the metaphor of the slow dissolution of the totalitarian “monolith” to be more productive. The institutional structure of the Communist regime collapsed, but its main institutions (which ensured the organization of power and social control) remained all but unchanged, turning into the new regime’s points of crystallization.

Let us analyze these aspects in detail.

During the 1990s, Russia was the theater of a fierce struggle for power among the various factions of the former nomenklatura. These voiced, in turn, the need for coherent and structural reforms, or the importance of conservative politics. Boris Yeltsin’s government (faced with the weakness of new and the erosion of old command mechanisms) declared its intention to subvert Russia’s historical paradigm, and thus its aim to dismantle authoritarian and totalitarian power structures

⁴ B. Golovachev, L. Kosova and L. Khakulina, “Formirovanie praviashchei elity v Rossii,” *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia: ekonomicheskie i sotsialnye peremeny*, no. 6 (1995): 18–24 and no. 1 (1996): 32–38; L. Gudkov and B. Dubin, “Posttotalitarnyi sindrom: ‘upravliaemaia demokratiia’ i apatiia mass,” in *Puti rossiiskogo postkommunizma. Ocherki* (Moscow: Movskovskii tsentr Karnegi, 2007), 8–63.

⁵ V. Mau and I. Starodubrovskaja, *Velikie revoliutsii. Ot Kromvelia do Putina* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2001).

and create a new state based on the rule of law and on democracy. Yeltsin followed this course until the mid-1990s, that is, until the 1995 Duma parliamentary elections and subsequent presidential elections revealed the increasing weakness of his stances. Starting in 1997, he made a dramatic reversal in his domestic and foreign policies, staking his power on structures of force, namely, the secret political police (former KGB), the military, and armed units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which he deemed a more reliable support for his personal power than the new institutions and pro-presidential parties.

Consequently, the contradictory and ineffectual reforms of the first half of the 1990s only demolished peripheral government structures, whereas the central social institutions, those connected to the organization of power and to the legitimacy of the social order, remained firmly in place. While the structures of power, above all in the economic sphere, also underwent certain changes, the system's top-down nature was left untouched, as shown by its autonomy from society (the *nomenklatura* principle of appointments), by the absence of political feedback and checks via elections and rotation of power among political parties, and by the failed separation of powers (the dependence of legislative and judicial bodies on the administration of the executive).⁶ This means that society—as a plurality of interests, ideas, perspectives, and values—was excluded not only from the decision-making process (the choice of which goals to pursue and the definition of the programs with which to pursue them, the discussion of development strategies, economic politics, and so forth), but also from control on power organs, the results of politics, government expenses, and the like.

Central institutional elements (particularly those having to do with the organization of power) remained in place only thanks to the fact that the Soviet state's distributive and economic management functions were greatly reduced. In other words, certain central institutional elements were preserved at the expense of a series of social commitments. The practice of coercion received new justification, without losing its ambiguous and "exceptional" character. Indeed, authorities had the

⁶ O.V. Kryshchanovskaia, "Sovietization of Russia, 2000–2008," *Eurasian Review* 2 (2009): 95–134.

population's consent to resort to special judicial procedures and could avail themselves of a number of exceptions to the law.

The show of political pluralism ("multiparty system") of 1992–96 amounted to a heated competition among a multitude of derivations, fragments, and factions of the earlier *nomenklatura*, which exploited mass media, now freed from Communist Party censorship and ideological monopoly, for their own purposes. In and of themselves, these groupings (former provincial committee secretaries, "presidents" of new autonomous republics, "red directors" of defense industries, and officials) were far from being keen on the ideals of democracy and rule of law. However, their fierce infighting allowed new laws regulating how reforms should be implemented and facilitated political compromise. The new political groupings were not "parties" in the classical sense of Western political theory—organizations established from the bottom up, rooted in mass democratic movements or to represent the interests of particular social groups. Imposed from the top down for the purpose of mobilizing the electorate, these political machines increasingly turned into tools for the public acclamation of those who already held real power. That is to say that they turned into "parties of power," or "parties of command." (After reformers stepped down from government, Yegor Gaidar's "Democratic Choice of Russia" was replaced by "Our Home–Russia," led by the newly designated prime minister Chernomyrdin, and, after the latter resigned, by Primakov's "Fatherland–United Russia," an even more conservative bloc, which included in its ranks former Cheka servicemen, communists, regional administrators, and *nomenklatura* functionaries of high standing.) The party in power never competed against liberals or democrats, but rather against lower-ranking figures, "body doubles" for increasingly reactionary Soviet functionaries. Thus, with each election, the leeway for ideological diversity and pluralism got smaller, and party programs became weaker and more alike.⁷

⁷ After Putin's ascent to power and the complete liquidation of the opposition, the remaining parties of the "approved opposition" were transformed into electoral facilities or political broker companies, ready to ensure a seat in parliament, for a fee, to any candidate, regardless of ideology and political programs. See A. Kynev, "Osobennosti

In the late 1990s, the party and economic nomenklatura started to be replaced by former employees of the secret police, by agents of the political police, by members of the military, by those who came to be known as *siloviki* (“men of power”) in Russian administrative parlance, but also by important bankers and industrialists close to the president, the so-called new oligarchs. There was no longer a need for an ideology announcing the construction of a “new society,” nor for the integration of the country with European democracies. Their politics was based instead on principles of conservatism (“social stability and a strong state”), traditionalism (“the safeguarding of national traditions and values,” orthodoxy, anti-Occidentalism, Russia’s return as a great power, the values of a close-knit family), and “the unity of people and power.” In practice, this entailed the repression of the opposition (of both pro-Western reformers and conservatives rooted in the old Communist Party), rigged elections, and the transformation of still-free mass media outlets into organs of state propaganda. In 1992–96 Yuri Luzhkov and other Russian politicians already began to voice revanchist ideas about redrawing of state borders, “return of Crimea” and the recognition by the West of the post-Soviet space as “a zone of special interests” of Russia.

All subsequent developments in Russia stemmed from Yeltsin’s choice to appoint a representative of the secret political police as his successor and as the guarantor of his personal safety. By doing this, he paved the way for the men of the Soviet secret services—whose corporative mentality was alien to liberal ideas, the constitutional state, and Westernization policies—to seize power. This choice led to complete replacement of cadres in the mid-ranking and low-ranking bureaucracies. It is important to emphasize that Vladimir Putin’s regime did not originate from the collapse of the previous system or from the defeat in the Cold War. On the contrary, the Yeltsin system with its market economy, parties, regional and municipal authorities and media had elasticity and resilience the old system had lacked. At the same time, it was neither the result of a successful election of a political party with

mezhpartiinoi borby v rossiiskikh regionakh: borba grupp vliianiia i imitatsiia partiinosti,” *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniia* 4 (2009): 24–37.

a clear program and ideology, nor the victorious outcome of a social protest movement.⁸

During the critical conjuncture faced by all government systems in the 1990s, the then supreme ruler of the country saw the organs of the KGB/FSB, with their monopoly on state violence, as *the only organized force* capable of providing him with solid support. But by relying exceedingly on secret services, the Yeltsin administration soon found that it had become a hostage of the political police. Indeed, the latter drew precisely on its special powers (the freedom to act outside legal and institutional bounds) and succeeded not only in ensuring its control over the country, but also in taking on an extraordinary role within the country's social and political order. As revealed by Olga Kryshstanovskaia's calculations,⁹ starting in 2001–2, former collaborators of the secret services held three quarters of the top-tier positions in the Russian government and a fourth of those in intermediate levels of government.

Putin in Power

The problem does not lie so much in the weight “secret collaborators” carried within government, as in the actual changes that took place in government practices. By ensuring the coercive, irregular, or inadequately legitimized redistribution of goods, cash flows and administrative privileges, the political police became the hidden hand of political power. With Putin at the helm, the cadres of the secret police took on a role that in some ways resembled the functions of the *nomenklatura*—they made up a staff pool from which people could be recruited to positions of power. Further, by enforcing a policy of re-privatization (property requisition and cash flow reassignment), and, later, renationalization (by buying controlling shares in joint-stock companies or establishing huge state corporations), security services effectively

⁸ The opposite is true, for the electoral and party base, which provided the new government with popular support, was formed after Putin and his men rose to power.

⁹ O. Kryshstanovskaia, *Anatomiia rossiiskoi lity* (Moscow: Zacharov, 2004).

replaced economic planning, the erstwhile instrument for control over the economy.

As already stated, the regime developed under Putin is the logical continuation and strengthening of the authoritarian tendencies seen in Yeltsin's government. Its main features are:

- 1) The centralization of state government; the transferring of all power to nonconstitutional bodies (the president's administration, which in practice replaces the government); the decline of parliament and its functions; the Duma and Federation Council's submission to the administrative power; the increased dependence of the legislative and judiciary on the president's administration (on local powers at a regional level). On the whole, this might be characterized as a process by which *abuse is granted immunity*, or as a return to an archaic and traditionalistic model of autocracy and to a personalistic political system.
- 2) The liquidation of local and regional self-government; the negation of federalism.
- 3) The deterioration of decision-making mechanisms; the explicit suppression of competition among parties and social movements, and the consequent diffusion of traditionalistic imitations of earlier symbolic constructions by the state; a rapid increase in ceremonial aspects of political practice, shadows of political and social ideas, national values and objectives.
- 4) The tightening of police and administrative control on public life and the repression of independent media; the dramatic reduction of nongovernmental organizations' (NGOs) freedom of action, and their replacement by comparable public structures with a purely decorative function (the Civic Chamber and other bodies mimicking civil society); the establishment of youth groups to threaten, intimidate and discredit political adversaries, as well as to display the force and unity of the regime's supporters: Nashi (Ours!), Molodaya gvardiia (Young Guard), and other variants of pro-Putin youth groups.

- 5) The administrative control over key sectors of the economy, carried out arbitrarily and in the sole interest of specific clans of the Kremlin or of regional elites, through the appointment of functionaries close to the president at the helm of large state corporations or corporations with state participation.
- 6) A pseudo-traditionalist style (the passion for soldiers, military parades, and state rituals).
- 7) A simulated democracy and rigged elections; the banishment of opposition from the political stage; the coercive formation of organized consensus; the impoverishment of everything having to do with the self-organization of “society” and of the public sphere as a whole (literature, journalism, and so forth).
- 8) A demonstrative, aggressive and conflictual foreign policy, marked by blackmailing and offensive tones toward neighboring countries, particularly less-densely populated ones; the instigation of collective hostility toward bordering states, and the strengthening of the country based on the development of a negative identity and mobilization.
- 9) The exponential growth of corruption, first and foremost among the high and middle ranks of state management.
- 10) The mortifying of social-selection mechanisms; the compression or shutdown of the channels of vertical mobility; the “sclerosis” of the state administration structure.

The apparent separation of powers is but a cover for administrative arbitrariness and abuse.

Securing its control first over mass media and then over the judicial system and parliament, Putin’s regime crushed the processes by which the functions of the institutional system were being differentiated and society was being separated from government, initiated by the reforms of the 1990s. I am referring to the acknowledgement of the autonomy of the “branches of power” (proclaimed by the 1993 constitution, never put into practice), as well as to the relative independence (“autonomy”) of social institutions—including economic, educational, civic, and religious ones—from the state. The personal interests of those who

claimed all the executive power for themselves came to be one and the same with the state. This not only entailed reversal of the 1990s privatization in favor of the state power, but also legitimized an arbitrary use of the law. Indeed, requisitions became a practice of state and administrative politics against which there could be no defense.¹⁰ The combination of secret-police methods and the practice of legitimizing administrative abuse, in addition to the Kremlin's media monopoly, robbed individuals—private citizens, entrepreneurs, or single employees wishing to protest power crimes—of every right and made them socially vulnerable. After big business was subjected (in the war against “oligarchs”), and after regional and municipal authorities were reined in, it was the turn of non-governmental associations and organizations with no direct link to the state or to politics to admit their dependence on the Kremlin. (There are many examples of this turn, from changes at the helm of the Russian Cinema Workers' Union to the introduction of Basics of Orthodox Culture in school.) What we are seeing today is not a new phase of “stagnation,” but an increasing social and cultural decline that is quashing attempts at modernization. Less overt with regard to the economy (at least before the outbreak of the crisis), this regression is blatant as concerns values, social morals, the arts, and education—that is, all those spheres that are more visibly affected by the politics of a police state after one generation. The Kremlin's growing control over the electoral system, and over social organizations, and its intervention in economic matters were not offset by public resistance, which was weak, or by the increased corruption, which the population resorts to as something of a compensation for the state's abuse of power.¹¹

Now that the power-strengthening mechanism has been triggered, the regime can no longer stop it. After all, there are no forces opposing the process. It is in plain sight that coercion has been on the rise with

¹⁰ The best-known example of this practice is the YUKOS case involving Mikhail Khodarkovsky, pronounced guilty for the second time on grounds that appear to be provocatively contemptuous of all principles of common sense and justice.

¹¹ See the articles by T. Vorozheikina, N. Petrov, and E. Pain in *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniia* 4 (2009), special issue dedicated to the matter of Russian authoritarianism.

each passing year. Surely, it will continue to escalate in the future. There will be more rigging of elections and trials, and the pursuit of complete supremacy over society will not subside. Thus, there will continue to be campaigns against espionage, extremism, historical revisionism, abuse of the Internet, tax evasion, and so on. The regime may already have reached that stage wherein those in charge, for sheer self-preservation, feel that they must continue doing what they have been doing, even though they see the error and danger of their ways. The scale of the abuse and outright contempt of the law—many instances of which are reported daily by the Russian press—precludes those at the highest echelons from making their escape and handing the power over to other groups, for to do so would automatically lead to their arrest. Nor are such misdeeds a secret to the public. The latter is very much aware of the widespread corruption and bullying of state bureaucracy.

The Sterilization of Public Opinion

To preserve the social order, manipulating society by way of new technologies has become of the utmost importance. This manipulation depoliticizes, deideologizes, neutralizes, or sterilizes the public opinion, and suppresses the autonomy of each and every influence group. In keeping with this logic, the Kremlin's main task is to thwart political initiative and the population's partaking of the mechanisms that ensure control on power and on its alternation. For this to happen, the authorities must not only make an effort to neutralize all existing forms of social solidarity, but also constantly and systematically work to fragment society, by foiling the rise of horizontal social relations, by excluding political parties from the social scene, by encouraging a purely diversionary and sedative function of mass media, and by debasing society's intellectual life. Only by lowering society's cultural and moral standards, and by suppressing citizens' awareness of their own dignity, can the people in power preserve their dominance and active control. The authorities must offset citizens' motivations and aspirations to succeed and to reach loftier goals, nip in the bud all mechanisms for their selection and improvement, and deny them

any prospect of being rewarded or acknowledged for their innovative behavior.

To be fair, there have been opinion movements and political groups aiming to transform Russia's totalitarian institutions and bring changes into being. Yet these have not reached the "critical mass" necessary to produce any kind of political effect. The main factors hampering the process are the inertia of the Soviet system, in which the population adapted to a repressive state, and the persistence of fear. These factors prevent mechanisms of collective solidarity and reciprocal responsibility from being activated. Until these processes arise and are completed, the notion of the political responsibility of those in power can't possibly take root in Russia's collective conscience—which explains why, during the 1990s (before Putin's authoritarianism was consolidated), a passive "spectator democracy" was established that did not entail any kind of individual participation or shared responsibility. Since Putin's "sovereign democracy" set in, things have gotten much worse. Liberal parties and NGOs, as well as movements with no access to mass media, have had to endure administrative pressure and constant slander. As a result, they have failed to appear authoritative enough to gain the support of an active part of the population. Further, their leaders have been greatly inhibited and discouraged by the perception of their powerlessness and of the social isolation in which they operate.

The anomaly set in motion in the first half of the 1990s has intensified and come to be accompanied by widespread demoralization and cynicism. These symptoms are due, in part, to the disillusionment with the results of the perestroika in the first half of the decade. But they may also be viewed as a reaction to the extraordinarily tougher period of economic (market) relations faced by the country. No one in the democratic camp—let alone in the population at large, reared in the spirit of state paternalism and demagoguery, as exemplified by slogans like "the solicitude of the state for its citizens"—was prepared to tackle this shift from a socio-political and administrative point of view. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, public opinion polls revealed society's increased need for "order, a firm hand, and respect for the law" brought on by a strong and personalistic leadership. Interviewees claimed that the latter "could" and therefore "should" stand its ground in the face of

the arrogance of the administration, of governors, of entrepreneurs, of local authorities, of the police, and of crime. These kinds of illusions are not casual. They reflect the moral and intellectual state of Russian society. People's dismay and frustration at the sudden complications and uncertainties of the times, and their feeling of having lost control over their lives, primarily over their daily lives, were bound to lead to popular discontent with the changes underway and with the promoters of these changes.

People's expectations were fulfilled, though not entirely, by Putin's rhetoric on state paternalism, and on the restoration of the Soviet past and national plans, without which centralizing command and reducing the autonomy of groups and institutions would have been difficult.

As a result, 75 percent of all Russians interviewed in a July 2008 survey claimed they would not want to participate in political actions or social activities, even if these actions and activities concerned the problems of the city or neighborhood they lived in (25% of those interviewed, however, claimed that, under specific conditions, they would want to partake more actively in the political life of their city or country, but that they had no such opportunity). The obstacles to political participation—manipulations, intimidations, abuse of authority, and so forth—have long been known and documented in the press and on the Internet. The absence of fair elections and referendums, the lack of free access to the media, the exertion of pressure on organizations, the enforcement of censorship, and similar abuses, all define an environment in which the “habit of endurance” seems like the only true expression of popular wisdom, a strategy of passive adaptation to the bullying of those in power. For this reason, the majority of the population (54%) does not feel responsible for what happens in the country.

A substantial part of society does not feel the need for socio-political or economic changes. Generally speaking, it is the lower orders of society—the poor and underprivileged, people who live in rural areas, and in small or mid-sized urban centers—that feel this way. This is also true of older citizens, despite their noticeable nostalgia for the Soviet era. As pointed out by studies dedicated to the matter, this mass of people has little incentive to work. The stagnant unemployment of the last few decades and the irreversible impoverishment of the countryside have

led to widespread anomy (habitual law-breaking, rampant alcoholism and social diseases, socialization problems during adolescence, and other difficulties that typically affect the lower classes of a population).

Chronic impatience and irritation are quite prominent, but they do not lead to action. The authorities react in various ways and ease the tension slightly, without removing the reasons for discontent. This impatience does not mix up with social protest, because it is of a different nature and it does not threaten the system's functioning. On the contrary, it is an integral part of the system that regulates the current relations between power and citizens, and it is useful to the regime to the extent that it does not propose to transform it as a "system," but only to substitute its "key players," replacing bad rulers with "good and honest" ones. In the eyes of the authoritarian state, this kind of mass discontent, only expressed "in private," is merely a "safety valve."

Having said that, I must underline the ambiguity of the role played by the educated segment of the population. The latter is surely the bearer of social expectations and, in part, the promoter of certain forms of modernization. Yet the social elite believe all its innovative potential is deployed in the management and transformation of power. Thus, it relinquishes its own responsibilities, deprives itself of any kind of moral authority or social prestige, and leaves the population at large devoid of tools with which to understand the present and find a way in the future.

If a form of democracy—albeit a passive one—existed in the 1990s, by the mid-2000s the educated classes of the population started coming forth much more forcibly in favor of nationalism, clericalism, and traditionalism. Opportunities to represent a variety of interests and social groups in the public sphere and on the political stage were greatly diminished, if not altogether removed (except in the press, whose audience, though, is much smaller than television's and the Internet's). The disappearance of politics as practice, the impossibility for social groups to participate and voice opinions, the suppression or reduction of freedom of NGOs and other forms of civil participation all paralyze Russian society—which has a hard time realizing its own dependence on power, or indeed its being held hostage by it—and thrust it into a state of apathy and torpor.

The Impossible Modernization

What is currently developing in Russia is a political system oriented to the preservation of the status quo. And this is the main obstacle on the country's path to progress. By subordinating the mechanisms of political competition, the mass media, the activity of social organizations, the judicial power, and other institutions to its own control, the regime in power is hampering the processes of social and structural differentiation, and robbing the system of its chance to modernize. This leads to the intensification of traditionalism and nationalism (used to counterbalance frustrations in the wake of the collapse of the USSR), to the conservation of antiliberal and anti-Western stances within the population, to a propensity for a paternalistic state, and to a widespread diffusion of isolationist ideas. We might say that Russian society is experiencing a general intensification of conservatism and of political apathy, a process well known to other countries in which authoritarian regimes are in transition.¹² The rule of ideology has been replaced by that of political technologies instrumental in ensuring that the population is kept passive, low on expectations, mistrustful of political parties and organizations of civil society, and doubtful of any chance of change.

Unlike what happens in totalitarian regimes, where mass mobilization hinges on the call for a *new society* and a *new man*, and where such symbols of accelerated modernization arouse popular enthusiasm and distorted forms of idealism and self-sacrifice, Putin's authoritarianism relies on a different strategy to secure mass domination. Its effectiveness is based on its ability to systematically demobilize, demoralize, and fragment society; destroy complex relation and cooperation structures; and prevent the common person from proposing a different and better society, and committing to its achievement. In this system, citizens do not envisage anything qualitatively better, but only that what they see in their current situation will be repeated and multiplied. It is owing to this model that indifference and pseudo-traditionalism

¹² J.J. Linz, "Totalitarianism and Authoritarian Regimes," in *Handbook of Political Sciences*, ed. F. Greenstein and W.N. Polsby (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975), III: 175–411.

are rampant in Russian society. The public sphere is subsumed into the “spectacular” world of television, with the constant staging of a show in which the country as a whole appears to be in perpetual celebration. The collective intellectual, moral and religious mortification of Russian society also turns up in its imperviousness to political demagoguery, which, however, does not stop the authoritarian regime from strengthening its power.

By neutralizing the social discontent of poorer and more marginalized segments of the population, the regime dooms all Russian society to apathy and estrangement from politics. Putin’s authoritarianism has not been made stronger by virtue of its having achieved any specific goals in terms of political reasoning, values, or programs for national development. It has increased its hold precisely because it has made a clean sweep of all representations of the future and of any possible (and desirable) change, thrusting society into indifference, and depriving the more active social groups of the chance to oppose the abuse of those in power. The lack of faith in the possibility of a “better life” (the erosion of this symbolic and normative representation, its rapid impoverishment and emptying of sense, if not its downright annihilation) works like a kind of moral AIDS, which destroys the immune system’s barriers against violence and demagoguery, and assaults its ability to oppose administrative abuse and the requisitions carried out by functionaries in the name of the state, of order, and of the law. The Putin administration has discredited reformists and pro-Western democratic parties, characterizing them as responsible for the collapse of the USSR and for all the crises that took place in the 1990s (including the harshest one, in 1998), and blaming them for the drop in the population’s standard of living. By so doing, it has divested the models of democratic political construction, the concept of freedom, human rights, and the mass consensus for democratic party leaders of all their appeal. Conversely, the regime has promoted ideas of social order, super power, militarism, tradition, orthodoxy, and conservatism, which have formed the state’s official ideology since Putin’s ascent to power. With the outbreak of the Second Chechen War, and the negative reaction the latter caused in European countries, anti-Western attitudes and the propensity for isolationism have also intensified considerably.

During Putin's presidency, his entourage exploited the extraordinary circumstances that the very same power system had contributed to create. Throughout his first term, several bombings took place in various Russian cities. These were followed by a series of events and measures that strengthened the regime's power: the Second Chechen War and the introduction of war censorship in the mass media; a special regulation of the relations between the various actors of the political process and the authorities; the unification of regional legislation, which was changed "in compliance with federal laws." Suspicions exist that the bombings were deliberately provoked by the security services in order to exploit the atmosphere of emergency that they would inevitably engender, but no solid proof has been found yet to substantiate them. During Putin's second term as president, the country was confronted with the Beslan school hostage crisis and the administrative "revolution" whereby regional governments would no longer be elected, but nominated by Moscow. This political earthquake had to do not with the need to oppose "international terrorism," but with the need to manage the aftermath of the policies carried out by the government itself in the Caucasus. The arrogance of regional elites was quickly curbed, and everyone else learned their lesson. The removal of opposition parties from the political scene has fundamentally drained the Russian parliament of its relevance. It has turned into an organ for the legitimization of the interests of those in power, or into an instrument in the hands of lobbyists, clients of the ruling party, and members of the "opposition" that plays the Kremlin's game.

After the December 2007 elections, Russia has seen the rise of what is essentially a single-party system, for the conservative and populist Communist Party, Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, and Just Russia Party act without even a trace of autonomy from the authoritarian regime. This means those currently in power have defused the potential for ideological improvement and renewal. After putting an end to the relative autonomy of various social groups ("centers of influence" such as local power elites, economic lobbies, expert communities, and political parties), they no longer had a need for mobilization or ideological support strategies. Power has detached itself completely from society, eluding its control. This has also led to

the restyling of politics. The state's decisions are now carried out in the manner of the secret services (in which society is regarded much as an enemy), or through grandiose campaigns reminiscent of Soviet propaganda.

The state's increasingly repressive nature is the trademark of the changes brought on in the way those in power are legitimized. The need to move toward the West as a precondition for the country's modernization—with the denationalization of society and economy, the defense of private property and other human rights, and the Westernization of the concept of politics—had been the bedrock of post-1991 anticommunist power. All of the above, however, lost its relevance as the self-sufficiency of the president's power, an eclectic traditionalism, and the symbols of orthodox Russia as a great world power came to be exalted. The ineffectiveness of state politics has been compensated by a decadent nationalism, which has led to an increase in xenophobia within the country, and to a comparison with both "sister republics" (that is, Soviet and socialist republics) and Western states outside the country. Russia's isolationism, which has intensified under these circumstances, is currently curbed only by the fact that the highest echelons of power realize that their position depends on the market prices of oil, and that breaking off relations with the European countries or with the United States would be the end not only of the present administration, but of the regime as a whole.

The president's administration—as was once the case with the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party—holds absolute control over the appointment of people in key positions in the high and middle ranks of state management, of the judiciary, and of parliament. Real power is concentrated in the hands of a small and homogeneous circle of people lacking institutional definition. What we have is an informal clan, or a small number of obscure elites, made up of former employees or present functionaries of the secret services. By placing its own men in controlling positions in state institutions or state-controlled companies, this circle of people manages the most important processes of the post-totalitarian community. The primary principle for the formation of authoritarian and traditional despotic regimes holds true here: the legitimation of power occurs "from the top down,"

and the selection of cadres follows the same pattern. This means that state management is not based on specific competencies, but on the personal loyalty of lower executives to their superiors. The ensuing bureaucratic and administrative arbitrariness and abuse hampers the modernization of the political state system and the rise of modern institutions. It suffocates the development of a free law and the autonomy of parliament, while allowing the connection between business and state bureaucracy.

In certain ways, however, the inclination toward the “centralization” and “strengthening of the state” in 2004–11 was more apparent than real. A closer look revealed that state authority was losing strength and control over society, as compared to the Soviet period. Evidence of this trend could also be found in the decrease in the direct intervention of the center in economic matters (despite the many oscillations between deprivatization and latent state control, the role of direct management has undoubtedly been on the wane), in the deideologization of society, in the alienation of the masses from politics, and in the drop in election turnout and in people’s involvement in their preparation. The founding of large state corporations, active in different fields and delegated to carry out functions previously entrusted to government departments also attested to the new situation, different from Soviet times. These corporations are like other market players, in that they enjoy ownership rights over their goods. Yet, in contrast to other agents participating in the market, state corporations can count on their own armed forces, on secret administrative resources, and on complete protection from outside control, including tax inspections. Essentially, they are the result of atypical forms of elitist privatizations of state functions, in specific sectors or regions.

This peculiar and paradoxical weakening of the state power manifested itself in another phenomenon—corruption, which has increased quickly and reached almost every sector of society and every level of power. For a community in a phase of late or post-totalitarianism, corruption is a mechanism of adaptation to administration centralization and to the bullying perpetrated by those in power, activated by a little developed, apathetic, and traditionalist society. Corruption is one of the main symptoms (and consequences) of the lack of advanced

structural-functional differentiation and specialization, as well as of the absence of a complex organization of society and community life.

A most vivid case of the above-mentioned phenomenon is Chechnya today that became a zone outside the Russian statehood, ruled by the Kadyrov clan, terrorist in government style and mafia-like in structure. Chechnya is de facto outside Russian legislation and jurisdiction. The Chechens are excepted from the Russian draft (although they can be used for a hybrid warfare in Donbass). Financially Ramzan Kadyrov's Chechnya exists entirely because of transfers from the Russian budget. This premodern and expensive technique of dependency-control between the center and the periphery that the Putin regime uses in other parts of the country. The Kremlin tolerates various semi-criminal and criminal groups in control of various localities in Russia, the phenomenon brought to public notice by the Kushchevka gang trial.¹³

In a word, Putin's authoritarianism, or as a return to Soviet-like forms of power organization, should more appropriately be understood as the emergence—in a changed environment—of institutionally and stylistically old (“totalitarian”) structures, rather than as a restoration of the past.

To understand these processes, we must put aside the idea that society and its institutions can change completely, and simultaneously. The disintegration of a totalitarian system occurs in a discontinuous way. We might say that there are different rhythms of change in the various subgroups constituting the disintegrating state and society. The magnitude and speed of the change affecting the segments of the post-Soviet institutional system (as well as the likelihood that such institutional changes will occur) increase in proportion to their distance from central and symbolic institutions—in our case, power structures. The most meaningful changes take place in the economic system, in consumption trends, and in technical progress; in other words, in all those sectors of society that are linked to instrumental actions. Conversely, changes in the systems by which power and the institutions power relies on are organized (the political police, the

¹³ A. Levinson, “Kavkazskie problemy v narrativakh zhitelei Kavkaza i ostalnoi Rossii,” *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniia* 113 (2010): 88.

military, the Ministry of Interior Affairs, the Prosecutor, the Orthodox Church) are minimal, for they do not affect the functional relations between these institutions and other structural parts of the whole. Modifications in the power system are decorative or even regressive in nature. They aim to reduce the complexity of the power system itself, which appears “redundant” in the current clan-based structure. However, this regression—the “return” to a known model of state paternalism and authoritarianism—is favorably perceived by the elites and the masses, who see it as an innovation, as a turn for the most appropriate political course, and as a “new paradigm.”

The economic crisis of 2008–9 undermined social confidence and trust in the Putin regime, its ability to maintain economic development and steady growth of incomes. From 2010 on the rating of political support for the supreme leadership of Russia has been in decline. The growing uncertainty manifested itself in an explosion of open civic discontent in 2011–13 in Moscow and other major cities of Russia. This discontent was aimed against Putin. In response, the Putin regime declared a war against civil society. Structures and organizations of civic society have been branded as “foreign agents” and “subversive elements” that allegedly undermine consensus and order. During a brief period of time the Duma, controlled by Putin, passed over thirty new laws and legal amendments to the Code. The result of them was severe curtailing of freedom for NGOs, freedom of information, and Internet. A new legal foundation for repressive policies emerged.

The Russian leadership also reacted highly negatively to the attempts by the former Soviet republics to leave the zone of Russian influence. The intention of republics to join European Union and NATO meant a failure of dictatorships and undemocratic regimes in the post-Soviet space. This factor makes the Kremlin regard values of Western democracy and “expansion” of NATO as an existential threat. This became the lenses through which Putin looked at such events as the falsified elections in Russia in 2011–12, the Arab Spring, and the Ukrainian Maidan—as one giant conspiracy inspired and master-minded by the United States with the goal of building a monopolist world order under American domination.

Therefore the protests on Maidan and the national-democratic rebellion against the corrupt regime of Viktor Yanukovich became a grave threat to the Putin regime. Moscow launched a total and aggressive anti-Ukrainian propaganda campaign to counter this threat. The whole meaning of the current Russian politics and policies is in trying to discredit pro-Western forces in Russia itself, to destroy any foundation for reforms under the slogans of democratic national consolidation; to channel the popular discontent in Russia from the corrupt bureaucracy against the advocates of the state under law, democracy, and European orientation. This propaganda campaign banked on the whole potential of resentment against the post-Soviet countries, their “betrayal,” including indictment them in rehabilitation of their Nazi collaborators and their discrimination of Russian minorities. The main theses of the anti-Ukrainian propaganda were as follows: the West inspired and funded the events in Kiev; fascists and ultra-nationalists came to power, and this created a security threat for the Russian population in Eastern Ukraine. This population allegedly opposes the new Kiev leadership, opposes the ultra-nationalists. The task of the Putinist politicians was not only to block “expansion” and “export” of democratic and European values into Russia, by presenting them as deeply alien to “Russian traditions and morality.” The task was also to preset to the mass audience a repulsive example of destabilization inevitable after the overthrow of an authoritarian and kleptocratic regime. Another crucial symbolical motive went into this mix after the annexation of Crimea: Russia defends “their kin” in Eastern Europe, and also returns territories and lands that traditionally belonged to the Russian empire. The result was the surge of national euphoria, militarism and patriotic pride, that restored the legitimacy and trust of the acting power, became their main resource for preservation of authoritarian regime for indefinite period of time.

The reintegration of society and its consensus with the power clique have been achieved at the cost of extreme brutalization and even archaization of mass consciousness. The society took a huge leap backward, to the preceding phases of social-political and cultural evolution. The main factor of this negative solidarity is anti-Western resentment, the spike of anti-Western feelings. In November 2014,

73 percent of Russian respondents indicated their “negative attitude” toward the United States, and 63 percent expressed the same attitudes toward the European Union. This is the highest number to represent anti-American and anti-Western feelings during the entire period of recorded public opinion.

To conclude, I define the Putinist regime as a system of decentralized yet institutionalized use of violence by the power state structures that survived from the totalitarian regime. The power holders adapted these resources to their clannish and group interests. The legitimacy of power in any case remains problematic, its legality is narrow and formulaic, predicated on the absence of broad mass protest. This makes the regime unstable, with spurious chances for reproduction and peaceful transition of power. The consequences of Putinism are systemic policy of resistance to modernization processes, the use of new technologies for conservation of power structures. The regime seeks mental and psychological support in the periphery of the society, in the conservative and depressed areas of it, that have no chances and autonomous resources to cope with the collapse of Soviet social infrastructure. The present Soviet authorities have no strength, resources, ideas, or leadership potential for the modernization breakthroughs. The regime is afraid of modernization, because every transformation entails a real risk of destabilizing absolute executive power at the regime’s disposal. This process can be called the “abortive modernization” or even a relapse of totalitarianism.

Totalitarianism, Nationalism, and Challenges for Democratic Transition

GAIL LAPIDUS

From the very origins of the Soviet state, its successive leaders have faced the challenge of dealing with both the legacy of empire and the multi-ethnicity of its populations. It was Lenin who put in place the initial ideological concepts and institutional features of Soviet nationality policy, including recognition/support for national rights and cultural pluralism and the ethno-federal structure of the USSR, and Stalin who built on these foundations but developed them in new directions. In the period following Stalin's death, his successors wrestled with the problem of balancing the inherent contradictions of his legacy. But Gorbachev unintentionally brought these tensions to the forefront when his efforts at liberalization and democratization of the Soviet system unleashed a series of challenges to both the ideological and institutional foundations of the system, which culminated in the dissolution of USSR. Nor did the challenge of reconciling nationalism and democratization end with the disappearance of the USSR. While many of the post-Soviet states could view the end of the Soviet system as a liberation, and an opportunity to construct a new and democratic future, for the Russian Federation the experience was traumatic. It involved the loss of substantial territories and populations, the loss of superpower status, and the loss of a legitimating ideology. As Vladimir Putin would later lament, it was "the greatest geo-political catastrophe of the twentieth century."¹ The sudden and unexpected collapse—and the widely voiced suspicion that it was the result of a nefarious plot by

¹ "Poslanie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii V.V. Putina Federalnomu Sobraniuu RF," Moscow, April 25, 2005, www.kremlin.ru.

foreign enemies—created difficult and continuing problems in defining and legitimating a new and nonimperial Russian identity. Indeed, the pervasive fear that the Russian Federation could itself disintegrate along ethno-national lines was an important contributing factor in the movement away from the promise of a democratic post-Soviet Russia to the increasingly authoritarian and conservative regime that has emerged in the 2000s.²

Obliged to accommodate the political demands and movements that had contributed to his rise to the presidency of the Russian Federation, the Yeltsin government struggled to shape a postimperial identity. The ascendancy of Putin and then Dmitry Medvedev brought with it a rejection of the reformist impulses of both Gorbachev and Yeltsin, and an effort to weaken the ethno-federal structure of the Russian Federation and to create a more unitary authoritarian state based on a vertical hierarchy of power. It also brought with it diminished deference to the multinational character of Russian society and greater acquiescence in, if not support for, a rising current of Russian nationalism and extremism.

This chapter explores how successive political regimes sought to deal with the Russian imperial legacy in a continually changing environment, and how the effort to manage ethno-national interests and demands complicated the tasks of governance. The need to deal with territorially based ethno-national communities, with geographically dispersed ethnic minorities, with the ethno-federal structure of the Soviet state, and with the role of Russians as the dominant ethnic group in a multinational state were among the key challenges they confronted.

² The widespread anxieties about the potential for separatism were tersely captured in an article by a leading Russian specialist on ethno-national issues; L. Drobizheva, "Povtorit li Rossiia put Soiuz," in *Rossiia segodnia: trudnye poiski svobody*, ed. L. Shevtsova (Moscow: Institut mezhdunarodnykh ekonomicheskikh i politicheskikh issledovaniĭ, 1993.)

Gorbachev and the National Question

The dilemmas faced by the Soviet regime have complicated the efforts at democratization and reform in post-Soviet Russia. These dilemmas have roots in the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, which established Soviet power on the ruins of the tsarist empire. Seeking to appeal to the disaffected national minorities of the imperial “prisonhouse of nations” without jeopardizing centralized Communist Party leadership, Lenin had forged a compromise that built a fundamental contradiction into the Soviet system. The ethno-federal structure of the new regime offered an institutional framework and political legitimacy for protecting and advancing the interests of ethno-national groups while at the same time Soviet ideology and institutions anticipated the ultimate dissolution of national identities and loyalties and sought to create a supranational socialist community.

The political liberalization, which became a central feature of Gorbachev’s perestroika, unleashed an unprecedented and completely unanticipated tide of protests and demonstrations across the USSR in which ethno-national as well as economic grievances occupied a central place. It created an environment in which new political movements seeking the liberalization and democratization of the Soviet system could link demands for economic and political reform to calls for national revival and republic sovereignty. Although political mobilization around issues of ethnicity and nationalism came to play a key role during perestroika, and ultimately in the dissolution of the USSR, it was a role that was largely unanticipated by the architects and advocates of reform.

The Soviet leadership, and Gorbachev in particular, clearly failed to anticipate that the process of reform would inevitably reignite the “national question,” and they underestimated its potential explosiveness.

Gorbachev himself came to power ill-prepared both by personal temperament and by previous political experience to deal with the issue. He was clearly impatient that such emotional, indeed—as he viewed it—irrational sentiments could divert attention from the larger struggle over reform. In his initial preoccupation with rationalizing

the economic and political system, and his focus on efficiency and control, he demonstrated little sensitivity to how important decisions would impinge on ethnic relations. Gorbachev himself would later acknowledge that the greatest shortcoming of his entire presidency was his failure to recognize the seriousness of the “national question,” or to address it in a timely fashion.

Reform-minded scholars and intellectuals outside the political establishment were no better prepared to deal with the challenge. In contrast to the discussions of economic and political reform, which had long antedated Gorbachev’s accession to power, the “national question” was largely absent from their agenda. In part because of the tendency to view national attachments and loyalties as atavistic and unworthy of support, and in part because of an assumption that a shared commitment to economic and political reform would unify all progressive forces on an all-Union basis rather than divide them along ethnic and republic lines, the reformers were largely unprepared to confront the explosive emergence of national movements that gave voice to long-simmering grievances and ultimately to demands for republic sovereignty.

In succeeding years, as the process of reform gradually broadened the boundaries of legitimate economic and political activity, growing demonstrations and upheavals in the non-Russian republics forced a fundamental reexamination of nationality policy and culminated in the emergence of “new political thinking” on nationality issues.³ The delegitimation of Stalinism gave official sanction to increasingly sharp critiques of Stalinist nationality policies, calling into question the entire range of assumptions, institutions, and values that has formed the core of Soviet theory and practice over decades. The deportations and mass killings of large populations under Stalin now became a topic of legitimate discussion. Abandoning the illusion that the “national question” could be “solved” once and for all, that Soviet policy had created a new community based on the equality, prosperity, and harmony

³ This discussion draws extensively on the author’s “Transforming the ‘National Question’: New Approaches to Nationalism, Federalism and Sovereignty,” in *The Demise of Marxism-Leninism in Russia*, ed. A. Brown (Oxford: Palgrave Macmillan, 1984).

of all its members, and that remaining problems were merely “vestiges of the past,” the new approaches focused on the ways in which Soviet policies themselves had exacerbated ethnic tensions.

Central to these critiques was a reassessment of the very nature of the Soviet state. Contrary to official assertions that the USSR was an equal federation of sovereign states, it was now proclaimed in numerous publications that the USSR was in fact a highly centralized, virtually unitary state disguised in the trappings of a federation. Conventional accounts of the “voluntary accession” of various regions and republics came under attack in a new body of historiography that emphasized the processes of territorial expansion and conquest that had brought the territories and peoples of the USSR under tsarist and then Soviet rule, now drawing on the vocabulary of empire to characterize the Soviet system.⁴ Indeed, the assertion that the Soviet system has destroyed all vestiges of the tsarist “prisonhouse of nations” was challenged by the argument that the Soviet empire was even more oppressive and brutal than its predecessor. The myth that socialism had promoted economic equality among nations was supplanted by an argument over who was exploiting whom. The very notion of Russians as benevolent “elder brothers” was attacked as a patronizing effort to disguise the reality of Russification, assimilation and exploitation. Russians themselves began to complain with growing bitterness of this unprecedented and unjustified wave of Russophobia.

These discussions and controversies contributed to significant shifts in fundamental approaches to nationality policy. The first change involved growing recognition of the value of national cultures and the desirability of preserving them. In an environment newly hospitable to the idea of pluralism, if not full-blown multiculturalism, the traditional view that *sliyanie*—the convergence and ultimate fusion of nations and nationalities—was both a possible and a desirable goal of Soviet policy came under explicit attack. Gorbachev himself expressed concern over

⁴ The sharpest struggle for historical rectification was conducted by elites in Baltic republics to compel the Soviet leadership to publicly acknowledge the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, and the forcible Soviet annexation of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia during World War II.

the disappearance of national diversity by affirming, in a January 1989 issue of *Pravda*, that “we cannot permit even the smallest people to disappear, the language of even the smallest people to be lost; we cannot permit nihilism with regard to the culture, traditions and history of peoples, be they big or small.”

The new concern with rediscovering, reviving, and protecting national groups and their cultural heritage not only repudiated earlier assimilationist goals; it attached new importance to the revival of national languages and cultures, and to the role of the national republics as a framework for defending national values and identities. If, during the Brezhnev era, advocates of circumscribing the powers of the republics, if not eliminating them altogether, were ascendant, the situation was now radically altered by the emergence of republic cultural and political elites as major political actors.

It is not surprising then that the tide of national assertion which was sweeping across many of the non-Russian republics also gave new impetus and legitimacy to the public expression of Russian national consciousness, and to the view that Russia was itself a victim of Soviet rule. During the Stalin era and after, Russian nationalism had become increasingly identified with Stalinism as well as with empire—indeed, had been described in the West as a form of “national Bolshevism”—and had viewed the preservation and expansion of centralized Soviet power as a primary goal. This view began to be openly challenged from a variety of political positions; the argument was now advanced that the conflation of Russian and Soviet identities had been detrimental to Russia’s own development. Not only had Soviet rule deprived Russia of separate republic institutions through which its own political, economic, and cultural interests could be advanced; Russian statehood had effectively been dissolved in all-Union institutions.

The second significant change was the gradual acknowledgment that the entire federal system was itself in need of reform to enhance the capacity of the republics to define their own economic and political priorities. Advocates of republic political and economic sovereignty—whether in Russia or in other republics—did not necessarily view it as incompatible with the Union. Rather, the very elasticity and

ambiguity of the term “sovereignty” in Soviet discourse—a term that embraces decentralization, autonomy, and enhanced control over republic resources, as well as the whole gamut of arrangements from federalism and confederalism to full independence—was precisely what attracted advocates of diverse political orientations. Moreover, demands for republic sovereignty could be presented as a return to Leninist norms, an effort to give real content to rights long enshrined in the Soviet constitution itself. Support for Russian republic sovereignty thus constituted a novel strain of liberal Russian nationalism, which aspired to the creation of a Russian nation-state as an equal partner in a reconstructed federation of republics.⁵

The emerging new thinking on nations, nationalism, and republic sovereignty raised two key dilemmas for reformers, dilemmas that proved to be exceptionally divisive. The first was how to address escalating—and often competing—claims for national self-determination, particularly when they were not confined to the Union republics but were increasingly voiced by autonomous republics and even by national minorities lacking republic institutions of their own. In the case of the Union republics, which were formally endowed with sovereignty and the right of secession by the Soviet constitution itself, reformers were arguably seeking to give real content to rights already enshrined in Soviet law but whose exercise had been blocked. Advocates of changes in the status of the autonomous republics or of national minorities, by contrast, were compelled to base their argument on a more tenuous assertion of a broader right of national self-determination.

Influenced by the radical views of Andrei Sakharov and Galina Starovoitova, some members of the Inter-Regional Group of Deputies, a loose grouping of democratic forces in the first USSR Congress of People's Deputies, called for abolition of the entire multi-tiered structure of Soviet ethno-federalism, contending that only by giving equal recognition to all claims for national self-determination could the invidious hierarchy of national groups established by Soviet rule be overcome. Others feared that this approach in fact played into the

⁵ This current of thought is captured in R. Szporluk, “Dilemmas of Russian Nationalism,” *Problems of Communism* (July–August 1989): 15–35.

hands of conservative forces at the center who sought to use the autonomies to weaken the rights of the Union republics.⁶

The second dilemma faced by the advocates of reform was the challenge of balancing support for the right of ethnic groups to full and free development with their commitment to human rights, usually defined as individual rights, a tension that came to the surface only as the repressive features of the Soviet system began to be relaxed.

At the heart of much of the emerging new thinking about national relations was the repudiation of a striving for uniformity. Insisting that a country as vast and diverse as the USSR could not be treated as a monolithic whole, with uniform policies laid down by an omnipotent center, reformers called for the formulation of differentiated policies suited to the distinctive features and needs of different regions of the country. The radical decentralization of decision making they advocated would in any case result in increasingly diverse patterns of economic, political and cultural life from republic to republic; in different kinds of ties between center and periphery; and in diverse new relationships between republics and countries outside their borders. Although Gorbachev himself had earlier recognized that perestroika would proceed in different ways and at different speeds in different regions of the country, by 1991 he had been won over to the idea of an "asymmetrical federation." How, and even whether, these variations could be accommodated within the framework of a single political, economic and legal universe now emerged as a major subject of controversy.

Underlying the increasingly sharp struggle between traditional and reformist assumptions about nations and national identity were two contending visions of the Soviet future itself. While there were different emphases and views within each group, reformers tended to argue that the USSR should be reconstructed as a genuine federation, or even confederation, of sovereign national republics that should

⁶ In their view, measures ostensibly intended to enhance the rights of national minorities (such as the Law on Secession adopted by the Supreme Soviet on April 3, 1990, which permitted autonomous republics and even "compact national groups" to hold separate referendums on secession) were really designed to thwart in practice the self-determination of the Baltic, and potentially other republics.

enjoy substantial economic and political autonomy in shaping the destiny of their historical homelands. The center, in their view, should carry out only those limited functions of foreign and security policy, and of overall economic coordination, delegated by the republics. Conservatives, on the other hand, although giving lip service to reform of the federal system, assigned highest priority to preserving a highly centralized Union under Communist Party leadership, feared that the continuing delegitimation of Stalinism threatened it, and were fundamentally hostile to what they viewed as dangerous centrifugal forces. They viewed the entire territory of the Soviet Union as “our common home,” insisted there should be no corner of Soviet territory in which a Soviet citizen could not feel at home, and advocated the use of force where necessary to preserve communist rule and suppress all manifestations of separatism. The Gorbachev leadership, bitterly divided by these issues, struggled to find a position between the two around which a centrist consensus could be sustained.

In June 1990, persuaded that a new approach was needed, Gorbachev belatedly took the momentous decision to throw his support behind the demands for a new union treaty, hoping that pressure for greater republic sovereignty could be reconciled with preserving a reformed Soviet state through direct negotiations between the center and republics. These negotiations became the focal point of a bitter, year-long political struggle over the shape of a reformed federation and the mechanisms by which the changes should be effected.

Over the next ten months Gorbachev’s oscillation, his increasing estrangement from former advisors and supporters, and the threat of open collision between reformers and resurgent conservatives, brought the situation to a head. When Boris Yeltsin, the newly elected president of the Russian Federation, directly challenged Moscow by making common cause with the Baltic leaders, appealing to Russian troops in the Baltics to refuse to fire on civilians, and calling for Gorbachev’s resignation, Gorbachev launched a campaign by the apparatus to remove Yeltsin from office. Confronted by massive rallies in February and March 1991 in support of democracy and Russian sovereignty, culminating in a demonstration by half a million Yeltsin supporters in Moscow on March 28, Gorbachev faced a profound crisis. With

economic chaos mounting, political support for both socialism and Gorbachev plummeting, and centrifugal trends among the republics accelerating, it was clear that Gorbachev could not impose his own vision of a Soviet federation, and preserve the territorial integrity of the union, without the use of massive coercion. Such a resort to force, however, would undermine both his domestic reforms and his international support, and aggravate the accelerating economic crisis without resolving the fundamental issues. Confronting this stalemate, Gorbachev stepped back from the brink, met with Yeltsin and the leaders of eight other republics at a dacha at Novo-Ogarevo, outside Moscow, and pledged to work with them on a new union treaty and on serious economic reform.⁷

Despite the later assertions, it is unlikely that Gorbachev could have succeeded in negotiating the exceedingly complex issues entailed in restructuring the federation in the volatile environment of the time, particularly after a Ukrainian referendum in favor of independence complicated the situation still further. In any case the August coup had already dealt a fatal blow to these efforts. The entire issue was pre-empted when Yeltsin met in secret with the leaders of Ukraine and Belorussia to sign an agreement dissolving the USSR.

Although these events remain highly controversial to this day, the mutual recognition of existing borders and territories entailed in Belovezhskaia Forest and subsequent Almaty agreements of 1991, which transformed the internal boundaries of the union republics into international borders, arguably played a key role in insuring the relatively peaceful dissolution of the USSR.⁸ Indeed, in view of all the

⁷ The first draft of November 1990, prepared largely within the Party apparatus, had proved unacceptable to almost all republic leaders. A second draft, published March 21, 1991, gave the republics considerably more powers than had the previous one, but it was rejected by Yeltsin, among others, as flawed. The Novo-Ogarevo agreement gave the republics a direct role in drafting the new treaty through the creation of a Preparatory Committee.

⁸ The Commonwealth agreement that was ultimately signed by the leaders of eleven republics in Almaty on December 21, 1991 had two key features: it rejected the creation of any supranational institutions, and it committed the signatories to recognize and respect each other's territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders. The agreement thus created a *fait accompli* that smoothed the way for the speedy and universal

unresolved conflicts in the region, and the long accumulation of historical grievances and perceived injustices, it is unlikely that the complex issues could have been resolved through an ongoing negotiating process. The very haste and secrecy in which the Belovezhsky agreements were concluded forestalled protracted, open-ended, and inflammatory public wrangling over borders, territories, and minority rights. It also averted the potential danger of large numbers of contending actors simultaneously competing for domestic political advantage in each of the republics, all of which might well have exacerbated internal political conflicts and poisoned relationships among the republics while depriving them of the protection of the international community. The fact that this arrangement was swiftly legitimated and endorsed by international recognition of the 15 successor states was also a significant impediment to irredentist movements and to imperial revival.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of these momentous developments was the relatively peaceful way in which the USSR's dissolution took place, particularly in comparison with the experience of Yugoslavia. Notwithstanding apocalyptic predictions by Gorbachev himself, and by countless analysts and political figures in the region and in the West, that the breakup of the Soviet state would profoundly disrupt the international system, provoke dangerous interstate and interethnic conflicts over borders and territory, including the threat of nuclear conflict among the successor states, and unleash floods of refugees, the Belovezhsky agreements facilitated a constructive process of mutual accommodation among the successor states and contributed to the striking degree of statesmanship and restraint demonstrated by their leaderships in managing potentially explosive issues. While the region has not escaped without violence, until recently most of the conflicts—with the exception of the civil war in Tajikistan—have

international recognition of the new states, which in turn solidified and legitimized the agreed on arrangements and deterred or prevented destabilizing challenges to them. It also avoided a situation in which international actors could be blamed for imposing a particular set of arrangements, Versailles or Dayton style. In short, despite the understandable criticism it provoked, the commonwealth agreement, and Gorbachev's statesmanlike, albeit reluctant acquiescence in it, made a significant contribution to conflict-prevention, stability and regional security at a moment of considerable danger.

involved secessionist efforts by autonomous regions within the former republics that antedated the dissolution of the USSR. Republic borders have been largely observed, with the notable recent exceptions of Russian military intervention in Georgia—and recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia—and in Ukraine. Soviet troops were withdrawn from the Baltic states, the peaceful and cooperative denuclearization of Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan was successfully implemented, and the noisy territorial claims emanating from nationalist politicians have not been endorsed by top leaders and have been delegitimated by international organizations.

After the USSR: State and Nation-Building in Yeltsin's Russia

If national aspirations had served to mobilize populations against the Soviet system, they now served as a basis of state legitimacy: state-building in many of the new states was conceived as inseparable from nation-building, and continued to draw on discourses of national revival. In the Russian Federation, however, the situation was far more problematic. While the titular nationalities of the non-Russian republics viewed the republics as their homelands, Russians tended to conflate Russia and USSR, and had typically viewed the USSR itself as their homeland. Once severed from the empire that had been central to its identity for over five centuries and recreated as a state that had never previously existed within its post-1991 borders, the problem of Russia's identity became a major subject of debate. It was a discussion for which the new leaders of the Russian Federation were quite unprepared: they had long focused on issues of individual and human rights, but lacked a real conception of Russian statehood

Ironically, it was Russia's role in accelerating the demise of the Soviet Union that created the daunting challenges to nation and state-building that Russia itself faced after 1991. The legacy of the Soviet totalitarian state, and particularly of Stalin's nationality policies, had created an enormous number of potentially explosive "land mines" across the entire territory of the USSR with which the post-Soviet states were

forced to cope. Moreover, the dissolution of the Soviet Union left in its wake a massive ideological and political void and a Russian state lacking any clear and coherent conception of its national and state identity, as well as of its novel borders, populations, internal structure, relations with neighbors, and its place in the international system. What is more, the centrifugal forces that had contributed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union were not confined to the fifteen Union republics, but extended to the ethno-territorial units and ethnic groups within them as well. In leading the struggle for Russian sovereignty during 1990–91 Yeltsin had not only challenged the overcentralized and unitary features of the Soviet state; he had championed a doctrine of sovereignty “from the ground up,” supporting an expansion of the rights of local and regional units and encouraging local elites to “take all the sovereignty you can swallow.”⁹ In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, political weakness and economic chaos were contributing to a snowballing process of state-formation by ever-smaller ethnic groups and regions, and threatened—in the view of many observers—to bring about the disintegration of Russia itself. The widespread, if exaggerated, anxiety about Russia’s own future was well captured by the title of an article by a leading Russian specialist on nationality issues: “Will Russia Repeat the Path of the Union?”¹⁰

Although Boris Yeltsin had played a key role in the destruction of the USSR by clearly repudiating Stalinist totalitarianism, embracing Russian sovereignty and making common cause with other republics in attacking the Center, he lacked a coherent and well-developed approach to constructing a new Russian state. Three strands of the policies pursued by his government stand out as critically important.

Most important, his adoption of a liberal and antiimperial conception of Russian identity had far-reaching consequences in severing the Russian Federation from the Soviet “Center.” Partly in response to

⁹ *New York Times*, September 2, 1990. Yeltsin also suggested he was willing to give the autonomous republics ownership of the natural resources in their territories. B. Keller, *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, September 23, 1990.

¹⁰ Drobizheva, “Povtorit li Rossiia put Soiuz?”

advice from leading advisors on nationality policy, he also embraced a civic rather than ethnic conception of Russia's identity.¹¹ The English word "Russian" conflates two different words in the Russian language: *russkie*, which refers to Russian ethnicity, and the other, *rossiiskie*, which refers to a citizen of the Russian Federation. In elevating citizenship rather than ethnicity as the unifying principle of the Russian Federation, the Yeltsin leadership was adopting a vocabulary that signaled a novel view of the new state as a multinational community and distanced itself from traditional Russian nationalism.

This vocabulary did not fully dominate discussions of Russia's identity, nor were its implications for the nature and future of the Russian state articulated. The Yeltsin leadership failed to develop a coherent conception of Russia's identity, despite continued efforts to formulate one, including a national essay competition on the subject. Over time it was the growing ethnic consciousness and mobilization among ethnic Russians, and a rise in political activism by Russian nationalist organizations, that began to reshape the discourse.

A second strand of policies pursued by the Yeltsin government was its effort to accommodate highly mobilized non-Russian nationalist movements and to defuse potential separatist impulses by developing and supporting new, if still embryonic, federal arrangements. It was a form of "federalism by default" during a time of turmoil when the central government lacked the capacity to enforce its writ. It also corresponded to a key priority: to weaken core elements of the Soviet state through a partial devolution of power. Broadly speaking, Yeltsin sought to navigate the uncertainty and instability of the early years by adopting a relatively conciliatory stance toward assertions of local autonomy. The Federation Treaty, signed by all but two republics (Tatarstan and Chechnya) represented the high tide of the process of sovereignization and federalization. It officially acknowledged republican sovereignty and was premised on the principle that all

¹¹ Yeltsin's views about Russian identity were importantly influenced by his participation in the Inter-Regional Group of Deputies, and his association with Andrei Sakharov and Galina Starovoiteva, among others (author's conversations with Starovoiteva, 1990–92).

powers not explicitly delegated to the federal government remained the prerogative of constituent units.

Even prior to Putin's presidency, Russian federalism remained embryonic and incomplete, and lacked the key legal and institutional underpinnings of genuinely democratic federal institutions. A constitutionally based division of powers between federal and local authorities, and credible guarantees that these arrangements would be respected, was largely absent. Also absent was a clear consensus on what were the constituent units of the Russian federation and how they should be represented at the federal level. Most importantly, republics and regions lacked an independent financial base of their own as well as significant independent spending authority. They remained dependent on decisions taken in Moscow, and on the patronage of government officials, for the allocation of tax revenues and mandated expenditures on social services.

While the Federation Treaty was initially intended to be incorporated into the new constitution, by the time the constitution was adopted in 1993, amid continuing anxieties about the possible disintegration of Russia itself, rising hostility toward various manifestations of federalism and ethnic nationalism a more centralized conception of the federation was promoted. Over time, the conception of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic as a voluntary federation largely disappeared from view, references to republican sovereignty were dropped from the new constitution, no provisions were made for any right of secession, and constituent units were granted only those powers not assigned to the federal government. Moreover, efforts were made to minimize the distinction between ethnic republics and purely territorial regions by enhancing the status and rights of the regions. An increasingly unitary and centralized conception of Russian statehood was already gaining ascendancy. Indeed, by the mid-1990s a growing reaction against many of the trends set in motion by perestroika was visible among Russian political and intellectual elites, with the dissolution of the USSR increasingly blamed on national movements and on ethno-territorial federalism.

Nonetheless, the outcome did not represent a full victory for the advocates of a highly centralized government or a purely territorial

federation. Significant powers were to be exercised jointly by the central and republic (and regional) governments, including the protection of human rights and the rights of ethnic minorities, ownership of land and mineral resources, and environmental protection within the republics' territory. In addition, the republics (and regions) were awarded limited powers of independent legislation and taxation, and the right to establish state languages, to mention just two of the most important. But the adoption of the constitution could not and did not provide a definitive and final resolution of a whole range of key issues, all of which remained subject to continuous renegotiation and to behind-the-scenes bargaining between central and local authorities. In practice, Yeltsin pursued a strategy of "selective appeasement," seeking to conciliate and co-opt republican and regional elites by striking a series of informal and often secret bilateral deals over budgetary and tax issues and other prerogatives which supplemented, and in many cases ignored, federal legislation.¹²

The most critical issues of both nationalism and federalism faced by the Yeltsin government during this period involved policy toward Tatarstan and Chechnya, which were the focal point of resistance to the new centralizing trends. The peaceful resolution of the conflict with Tatarstan was the Yeltsin government's most singular achievement, and the failure to similarly resolve the conflict with Chechnya its greatest failure. Following difficult and protracted negotiations with Kazan a treaty was finally signed in February 1994 that recognized Tatarstan as a sovereign republic and granted Tatarstan considerably broader competencies and rights than had been granted to other subjects of the federation, including significant economic concessions and the right to its own economic relations with foreign states. This agreement was criticized—from opposite positions—both in the republic and in Moscow, but the process of mutual accommodation through negotiations served to defuse separatist sentiments, enhance the loyalty of republic

¹² See D. Treisman, *After the Deluge: Regional Crises and Political Consolidation in Russia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); S. Solnick, *Stealing the State*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); and S. Solnick, "Federal Bargaining in Russia," *East European Constitutional Review*, 4 (1995): 52–58.

elites, and avoid the deadly use of force. The failure to reach a political solution over the status of Chechnya, and the resort to military force to bring the republic to heel, was not only a product of institutional weakness and intra-elite conflicts in both Moscow and Grozny but also a testimony to the fragility of Russian federalism itself.¹³

The agreement with Tatarstan was the first of a long series of bilateral treaties that were negotiated between Moscow and the republics and regions in subsequent years with differing terms corresponding to the distinctive features of each case. Admittedly this process was not without its serious problems; the proliferation of bilateral treaties conferring different rights on different constituent units arguably weakened the development of a single and uniform legal order and economic space for the Federation as a whole. Yet on balance this asymmetrical federalism in Russia represented a constructive and flexible response in a period of great fluidity to a Soviet legacy that created aspirations, expectations and institutional arrangements that could not readily be dismantled without risking destabilizing consequences. It tailored center-periphery relations to the varying needs and demands of different subjects of the federation, allowing for a useful degree of diversity and experimentation in a country as large and diverse as the Russian Federation. It also created a framework for satisfying the aspirations of major ethnic groups for recognition, security, and meaningful political participation, and opportunities for the preservation or enhancement of ethnolinguistic and cultural diversity, thereby defusing the potentially separatist connotations of republic sovereignty and transforming it into a legitimate form of regionalism. It located decision making on some key issues closer to the ground, and facilitated cooperation between moderates and pragmatists in Moscow and their counterparts in the regions and republics, while helping to marginalize or isolate extremists on both sides. Proposals to abolish the ethnic republics and replace them with purely territorial administrative units along the lines of the tsarist *guberniias*—an approach

¹³ For a more extensive treatment of the causes and consequences of the first war in Chechnya, from 1994 to 1996, see G. Lapidus, "Contested Sovereignty: The Tragedy of Chechnya," *International Security* 23 (1998): 5–49.

endorsed by former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov—was widely perceived, by the general population as well as by republic elites, as both unrealistic and needlessly provocative.

Indeed a leading Russian specialist on nationality issues, Sergei Markedonov, recently paid an unusual tribute to Yeltsin's achievements in these "unkind circumstances." In view of the chaotic situation he inherited, with mounting ethno-national and regional conflicts and with no managerial class, no legislative framework and no serious army to work with, he credits Yeltsin's government with averting a large number of conflicts, particularly in the Northern Caucasus. "Yeltsin's policy of making complicated arrangements to accommodate disparate interests," he argues, deserves to be recognized as a major achievement. "In the 1990s, the Russian government generally avoided exacerbating the situation in the Caucasus. It set up a system of state institutions and settled the most important issues of any revolution, the question of government."¹⁴

But mounting criticism of the Yeltsin government, and growing concern about the weakness of the Russian state and the threat of separatism, was accompanied by growing support for circumscribing the rights and powers of regional and republic authorities. The 1998 financial crisis had compelled regional authorities to adopt a series of autarchic measures in an attempt to shield their own populations from its consequences, although it also highlighted the ultimate dependence of regional authorities on Moscow.¹⁵ A renewal of the war in Chechnya, framed as a struggle against terrorism and for the unity of the Russian state, played a key role in propelling Vladimir Putin to the presidency, and would turn Russian policy in a more authoritarian, statist, and Russo-centric direction.

¹⁴ S. Markedonov, "Yeltsin's Complicated Legacy in the Caucasus," February 19, 2011, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/sergei-markedonov/yeltsin%E2%80%99s-complicated-legacy-in-caucasus>

¹⁵ G. Lapidus, "Asymmetrical Federalism and State Breakdown in Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 15 (1999): 74-82.

Toward a Unitarian and Authoritarian State under Putin

Vladimir Putin came to power with a radically different outlook, shaped by his long career in the secret services, an outlook that was famously captured in his statement that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century.”¹⁶ He came to power with a radically different agenda as well: not democratization but the strengthening of the Russian state along authoritarian lines. From the very outset of his presidency, his policies sought to weaken checks on central authority and undermine independent sources of power. They also included an important effort to weaken the status and role of ethnic minorities and regional groups in Russia’s political life. Under his leadership Russia has witnessed an ever greater concentration of decision making in the hands of a small circle in the Kremlin, recruited in significant numbers from the military and security services, and the progressive weakening of independent sources of information and power. A whole series of measures aimed at bringing independent mass media under government control, radically circumscribing the numbers, activities and independence of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), weakening pluralism in economic and political life, and limiting political competition to officially sanctioned parties and candidates, all curtailed civil and political freedom and undermined the elements of transparency and accountability which had begun to emerge in post-Soviet Russia.

Recentralization also involved a direct assault on federalism, which the Putin leadership viewed as a constraint on central authority and a contribution to separatism. The development of embryonic federal arrangements under Yeltsin that could simultaneously represent local interests and serve as a check on the central government was halted and circumscribed by a whole series of measures that diminished the powers of republic and regional leaders and brought them under the direct control of central authorities. The very ability of President Putin to initiate such far-reaching changes in federal arrangements, and to abrogate earlier agreements and treaties with republic leaders, is a

¹⁶ “Poslanie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii.”

clear indication that the institutional and attitudinal underpinnings of Russia's embryonic federalism remained weakly developed and highly vulnerable to a concerted assault by the central government.

The first step in this new policy involved the division of the country into seven federal districts headed by plenipotentiaries appointed by the center and drawn from the military and security services to oversee the affairs of republics and regions. The Federation Council was restructured to remove elected governors from its membership and replace them with appointees of the Kremlin. The direct election of regional leaders was also eliminated in favor of their appointment by the Kremlin. Additional measures deprived republics of direct sources of discretionary funding; the natural resources on their territory were brought under central control and funds channeled to local leaders were now tied to specific projects and dependent on relations with the center.

The government also forced the revision of republic constitutions to eliminate references to sovereignty and other provisions that were considered to conflict with federal laws, and insisted the heads of republics could no longer use the title "president." Finally, a campaign to reduce the number of federal subjects by folding smaller non-Russian regions into larger ethnic Russian ones, often over substantial resistance, was also an effort to weaken the political influence of compact ethnic groups. The abolition, in 2001, of a separate ministry for nationality affairs (or what had become by then a Ministry for Federation Affairs, Nationalities, and Migration Policies), and the reallocation of its functions among a number of different ministries and departments, signaled a desire to shift the focus away from the issue altogether.

Vladimir Zorin, then responsible for coordinating nationality policies but without a ministry, further foreshadowed these changes at a conference in October 2002, when he called for new thinking on nationality policy to reflect changes in the country's ethnic and religious map. Its main goal, he suggested, was to create a unitary state: "as far as possible, we will gradually move, so to speak, from ethnic-administrative subdivision of the country to a non territorial model."¹⁷

¹⁷ As cited in Z. Choltaev, "A New Nationality Policy or a New Setback for Russia," *Russia and Eurasia Review* 2 (2003).

In a subsequent article, he argued “Most experts today consider that our earlier approach . . . no longer meets the current challenges. The policy needs to be amended. And many specialists have a very specific idea of the direction these amendments should take: to recognize and strengthen the role both of the Russians as the country’s ‘state-forming’ people, and of Orthodoxy as the dominant religion.”¹⁸

As this comment suggests, a second priority on President Putin’s agenda has been the effort to consolidate Russian society around a new ideology in which unity is a central motif. If one thrust of efforts to forge a sense of national identity has focused on identifying and exaggerating the threat posed by individuals and groups labeled enemies of Russia—whether political critics, Islamic terrorists, or non-Slavic immigrants—another thrust has been the attempt to consolidate Russian society around new patriotic symbols and holidays as well as around a new officially endorsed version of Russian and Soviet history. The selection of the name “Unity” for the governing party, intended to bring a broad political spectrum under a single umbrella while eschewing a clear political program, was a particularly dramatic example of Putin’s effort to eliminate the sharp political contestation characteristic of the Gorbachev and Yeltsin eras and to embrace Russia’s entire national past, incorporating the tsarist heritage, the Soviet legacy, and the postcommunist order in a new set of patriotic symbols. A new anthem was promulgated based on its Soviet predecessor, and November 7 was replaced by November 4 as a new Russian holiday, now named the Day of National Unity, and intended to commemorate the end of the Time of Troubles associated with the collapse of the Russian state after the Polish invasion in the seventeenth century, a pointed use of historical metaphor to emphasize Russia’s revival under Putin.

The effort to construct a new national ideology emphasizing the continuity and greatness of the Russian state also encompassed the creation and promulgation of a new officially endorsed version of Russian and Soviet history. Evoking Soviet-era efforts to rewrite history along politically sanctioned lines, the new effort threatened to whitewash the crimes of the Stalin era, including the repressions,

¹⁸ Ibid.

deportations, famines and genocides which had sparked such bitter resentment among non-Russian national groups, all in the name of inculcating Russian patriotism and pride in past accomplishments. At a Kremlin-organized meeting convened in June 2007 to discuss “Contemporary Issues of Teaching Modern History and Social Sciences,” President Putin criticized the history and social science texts which had been developed during and after perestroika for devoting too much emphasis to “black pages” in Russia’s history and argued that “we must not allow others to impose a feeling of guilt on us.”¹⁹ He also implied that foreign funding had encouraged their authors to, in effect, dance to the tune of their sponsors. Two new volumes were unveiled on the occasion, one on history and another on social sciences, written in part by the Kremlin political consultants and intended as new textbooks and guides for teachers. Both reflected the dominant themes of official discourse, including a laudatory treatment of President Putin’s years in power and extreme hostility toward the United States. As Leonid Polyakov, a professor of political science and editor of the social studies manual, explained: “We are developing a national ideology that represents the vision of ourselves as a nation, as Russians, a vision of our own identity and the world around us. . . . Teachers will then be able to incorporate this national ideology, this vision, into their practical work in a normal way and use it to develop a civic and patriotic position.”²⁰

These trends continued even after Medvedev succeeded Putin as president of the Russian Federation. In a still further effort to influence the direction of historical writing on Russian history and combat Western historiography, particularly surrounding such sensitive issues as the Ukrainian famine (Holodomor), the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and the interpretation of World War II and its aftermath (the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states and eastern Ukraine) the Russian government in 2009 established a Presidential Commission to Counteract Attempts at Falsifying History to Damage the Interests of Russia. The twenty-eight members of the Commission included military officers and Federal Security Service officials, bureaucrats, and Duma

¹⁹ *Kommersant*, June 21, 2007; as reported in Johnson’s Russia List, 138, June 21, 2007.

²⁰ *Washington Post*, July 20, 2007.

members, but only two professional historians, one of whom, Natalia Narochnitskaia, was a prominent nationalist politician. Defending the purpose of the Commission, she asserted “If a nation is unable to come to a united view in interpreting its own past, it will be unable to formulate its national interests.”²¹ In another alarming throwback to Soviet practice, the creation of the Commission gave rise to invitations to institutes of the Academy of Sciences to identify falsifiers in their midst, and to legislation which would have imposed prison sentences for challenging official interpretations.²²

This effort to reshape historical writing on the Stalin era has also had important reverberations in Russian foreign policy as well as in domestic struggles within neighboring countries. It contributes to tensions in Russian relations with the Baltic states, particularly in connection with commemorations of the anniversary of the end of World War II. In the case of Ukraine, where former president Viktor Yushchenko had sought international recognition of the 1932 Great Famine as genocide, this position was repudiated by newly elected and Moscow-friendly President Viktor Yanukovich, who stated before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe that it was “unjust” to call the Stalin-era famine that killed millions across the Soviet Union a genocide of the Ukrainian people.²³ It is also a response to a growing body of Western historiography and discourse that equates Soviet with German mass killings.²⁴

To further promote this political vision, and with it an ideological struggle against Kremlin-defined enemies, the government has supported the creation of several youth organizations, of which Nashi was the most prominent. First launched in the wake of the “color revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine, and soon claiming some 100,000

²¹ Quoted in Radyuhin, “Russia: Fighting Historical Lies,” *Hindu*, June 24, 2009.

²² As Victor Zaslavsky pointed out in an interview in *Telos*, his own work on the Katyn massacre—among the many topics long falsified in Soviet historiography—could now subject him to imprisonment for challenging the official Soviet accounts of the events; *Telos*, July 27, 2009.

²³ RIA Novosti, April 27, 2010.

²⁴ N. Naimark, *Stalin's Genocides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); T. Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

members across Russia, Nashi's purpose was to promote patriotic values and support for President Putin and his policies among young people. In summer camps that combined recreation with indoctrination, young people were taught the elements of Putin's domestic and foreign policies and also received paramilitary and police training along with instruction in organizing mass actions. Although formally established to advance educational and cultural goals, in fact these youth organizations operated as political auxiliaries of the Kremlin, patronized by senior officials, funded by the Kremlin and its affiliated business figures, engaging in actions that would be deemed illegal if not for official support, and often promoting extremist and xenophobic agendas.

While seeking to exploit patriotic organizations to support his political agenda, President Putin has also expressed alarm at the spread of unsanctioned and unwelcome movements, and at the role of the internet in facilitating mobilization. Citing various reports, Putin asserted that in 2006 Russia had about 50,000 skinheads and another 15,000 people active in radical nationalistic organizations. "On the whole, far-right nationalists have been intensifying their activity in Russia," he warned. "The level of intolerance toward ethnic, religious and sexual minorities remains high." Radical, nationalistic, and openly neo-Nazi organizations have their websites in the Russia segment of the Internet. "They post lists of 'enemies' and their photographs and addresses. Some carry instructions on how to make bombs, as well as Hitler's and other Nazi leaders' biographies. And there are more intellectual websites carrying pseudo-research papers on the inferiority of ethnic minorities," he observed.²⁵

Efforts to encourage the development and promotion of a new national ideology have also been supported by the Russian Orthodox Church, which has sought to use the opportunity to enhance its own role in defining and shaping Russian identity. However, its effort to introduce a compulsory course on Foundations of Orthodox Culture in Russia's educational system provoked a backlash among members of other confessional groups, who in turn stressed the dangers of an

²⁵ As cited in Johnson's Russia List, November 11, 2006.

exclusionary approach in a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society. The Council of Muftis of Russia in particular expressed concern about the growing influence of the Russian Orthodox Church, and announced it would in turn press the government to expand instruction in Muslim culture beyond the Muslim republics in the North Caucasus to other regions with large Muslim communities.

The authorities' tacit acquiescence or even encouragement of Russian nationalism to consolidate political support has gone hand in hand with growing xenophobia in the Russian population itself. Sociologist Lev Gudkov, director of the Levada Center, which conducts opinion polls twice a year on the subject of ethnic hatred, reported in December 2010 that "Xenophobia literally soared some time earlier this year, approximately in mid-summer." Respondents who do feel animosity numbered 11 percent in 2009 and 19 percent in 2010, while those who reported experiencing such feelings on occasion dropped from 86 percent to 77 percent. The results of this opinion poll were known three months before the outbreak of serious interethnic violence in the center of Moscow in December 2010,²⁶ when a violent confrontation between nationalist rioters and police was touched off by the death of a young Russian soccer fan in a brawl with several Caucasians. The episode led to large-scale riots in the Capital by gangs of ultra-nationalist youth shouting racist slogans, giving Nazi salutes, and attacking non-Slavic passers-by. When riot police intervened to save victims of the attacks they were assaulted by flares, knives, and metal rods. Some thirty-two people were reportedly hospitalized, six with serious injuries, and five police officers were also injured.²⁷

Such outbursts reflect popular anxieties about a whole series of trends: the changing demographic situation, ongoing terrorism, and destabilization in the Northern Caucasus along with the spread of terrorism and criminal activity into major cities; and the influx of migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia, many of whom are

²⁶ A. Samarina and A. Ryabushev, "Banal Fascism," *Nezavisimaya gazeta* December 23, 2010; as translated in Johnson's Russia List, December 25, 2010.

²⁷ For an account in the *Financial Times*, see <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/7917d6c2-0616-11e0-976b-00144feabdco.html#ixzz1BEvnlpIX>.

also Muslim. While these migrants have alleviated a severe manpower shortage by providing the Russian economy with low-skilled labor at low wages, they also bring with them alien cultural norms and behavior which provoke fear and resentment, as well as conflicts between urban residents and newcomers. They are also associated in the minds of the population with ethnic mafias and the rise of violent crime. These attitudes reflect Russian ambivalence about the Northern Caucasus more broadly. While insisting that the region is part of Russian territory, its people are all too often viewed by Russians not as “ours” but as aliens. Despite the fact that these migrants are typically citizens of the Russian Federation or former Soviet republics and not immigrants from abroad, growing popular hostility has catalyzed movements directed against migrants and promoting a conception of Russia’s identity in which ethnic Russians occupy a central and privileged place. Repeated references in official speeches and pronouncements to Russians as the “state-forming people” of the Russian Federation, or the “native people” (*korennoi narod*) further legitimize these views.

The slogan “Russia for Russians” has been voiced with ever greater frequency in recent years, along with support for restrictions on members of other ethnic groups. Polled by the Levada Center about their attitudes toward this idea, the proportion of respondents who strongly favor implementing it has risen over the past decade, although one-third of respondents reject the idea as tantamount to fascism.²⁸

According to Gudkov, this xenophobic disposition, diffuse and vague as it is, actually leads to the demands to establish some kind of ethnic hierarchy. “In other words, the majority demands privileges rather than rights. It insists on a special status. Antipathy such as this consolidates diffident and deteriorating societies . . . It is proof of our degradation and absence of the institutions that develop adequate self-esteem in people.”²⁹

Although Putin has disavowed such attitudes and stressed that all citizens of the Russian Federation share a common motherland, and

²⁸ Levada Center, December 30, 1999–January 4, 2000; November 20–23, 2009.

²⁹ Gudkov further asserted that this rise in xenophobia was studiously ignored by the authorities.

that Russia has been a multi-confessional and multi-ethnic state,³⁰ not only has the government failed to take decisive measures against such extremism; all too often it has sought to use and manipulate aggressive nationalist sentiments and outbursts rather than confronting them. The danger, a noted ethno-sociologist has pointed out, is that nationalism is easy to awaken but very difficult to manage. The current authorities, he argues, presume that if it is possible to construct “managed democracy,” then managed nationalism must be possible as well. But today, in his view, “the answer to the question of whether the authorities have indeed sought to draw support from nationalism or whether it arose as a byproduct of authoritarian policies is not that important. What is crucial is that we recognize that nationalism has now escaped the control of the state and is developing independently of the desires and aims of today’s Russian establishment.”³¹

In the wake of rising interethnic tension and conflict, both President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin devoted part of their speeches at a December 26 meeting of the State Council to the dangerous state of interethnic relations. While Putin dwelt on the absence of such problems during the Soviet period, called for more emphasis on patriotism as the solution, and proposed that registration restrictions on migration to Moscow and St. Petersburg be tightened, Medvedev reminded the audience that the Soviet experience could not and should not be reproduced, and that new approaches were needed. He has also floated yet again the idea of promoting national consolidation around the idea of a civic “Rossiiskaia natsiia.”³² This term has long been championed by Valery Tishkov, who has argued that Russia should be viewed as a legitimate, civic nation-state similar to the nation-states of Western Europe.³³

³⁰ In a Q&A session on December 9, the prime minister commented that “Everyone has to understand that we are all children of the same country, so that a man from the Caucasus should not be scared to go out to Moscow streets, and Slavic people shouldn’t be afraid to live in the Caucasus.”

³¹ E. Pain, “Russia between Empire and Nation,” *Russian Politics and Law* 7 (2009): 79.

³² D. Medvedev, December 27, 2010, cited in Johnson’s Russia List, December 28, 2010.

³³ For a recent example, see V. Tishkov “What Are Russia and the Russian People?,” *Russian Politics and Law* 47 (2009): 30–59.

While some commentators have supported the idea as a further step toward the assimilation of non-Russians, others have criticized it as both a throwback to Soviet-era terminology, reminiscent of the “Soviet people,” and a confusion of civic and ethnic terminology. As another distinguished Russian ethnographer, Emil Pain, has pointed out, a civic nation is a form of social self-organization and source of popular authority, and this has yet to emerge in Russia.³⁴

All these efforts to define and promulgate a new Russian national identity based on the statist ideology of the Putin leadership have continued to elicit controversy. In media commentary, among scholars and educators, and in ethnic and religious communities, voices have been raised about the dangers of reverting to a Stalinist like-mindedness, or of treating history teaching as a tool to mobilize society against external enemies. They argue that these efforts are a step backward toward the Soviet past, incompatible with a modern democratic and open society.

Although the effort during the Putin years to deterritorialize the “national question” by gradually weakening the ethno-federal structure of the Russian state in favor of a more uniform and symmetrical system, and to prevent the emergence of ethno-national or separatist trends among non-Russian minorities, this chapter has suggested a number of ways in which elements of the Stalinist past have been preserved. Indeed the continuing emphasis on the need for a strong central authority to preserve Russia’s territorial integrity and even survival itself echoes the traditional Stalinist vocabulary. Moreover, even this policy has involved at least two notable exceptions. The first has involved the case of Chechnya, where the Russian leadership has been prepared to acquiesce in the creation of a brutal and corrupt regime under Ramzan Kadyrov, operating with virtual impunity and enjoying a level of autonomy that Dzhokhar Dudayev would have envied, in exchange for assurances of loyalty to Moscow. The second exception involves Russian support for the secessionist movements in Southern Ossetia and Abkhazia, which were formally recognized as independent states following the Russian military intervention in Georgia in 2008.

In a number of other respects as well, current Russian policies with respect to nationalism and ethnic relations remain inchoate and

³⁴ Pain, “Russia between Empire and Nation,” 61.

contradictory. While advocating an approach that treats ethnicity as an individual choice rather than an ascriptive category regulated by the state (for example, by eliminating the registration of nationality in passports), it remains the case that the many activities of individuals and of ethnic associations are highly regulated by the government. To mention just one example among many, only one cultural association can be officially registered for an ethnic group, however dispersed its members.

The laws against extremism are yet another example of poorly formulated and arbitrarily executed policies. While the law is ostensibly designed to prohibit and to punish activities that incite inter-ethnic or inter-confessional hatred and conflict, it has frequently been used against liberal opposition groups and individuals, including those opposed to nationalist extremism.

For a number of years the Putin leadership has been inconsistent in its attitudes and behavior toward Russian nationalist extremism, tolerating and acquiescing in some of its manifestations while criticizing and punishing it on other occasions. But a dramatic shift to a more aggressive and conservative Russia nationalism in recent years involves a repudiation of efforts to promote an inclusive Russian identity that can adequately accommodate Russia's multi-ethnic and multi-confessional population

The New Turn toward Aggressive Russian Nationalism

The ongoing efforts to consolidate Russian society around a new Russian national identity took a dramatic new turn during Putin's third term: toward a conservative anti-Western nationalism and a harsh crackdown on domestic opposition.

The domestic catalyst of this shift were the major protests and demonstrations which erupted following the parliamentary elections of December 2011 and the presidential election of 2012. Condemning the fraudulent conduct of the elections and widespread elite corruption, these protests sharply challenged Putin's leadership and questioned the very legitimacy of the system he had created. To President Putin,

unwilling to admit that such events expressed genuine popular discontent, they simply confirmed his deeply entrenched suspicion that the United States and other Western powers were provoking and supporting anti-regime protests in a continuing effort to weaken and ultimately dismantle Russia.³⁵ The government responded harshly with a new wave of arrests and trials and a campaign to further demonize opposition leaders as anti-patriotic. It also inaugurated a sharp turn toward a conservative anti-Western nationalism that counterposed traditional Russian values to alleged Western decadence.

But it was the Maidan demonstrations, and the change of government in Kiev that gave further impetus to this dramatic new direction in Russian discourse as well as in domestic and foreign policy, with Ukraine as the battlefield. From 2012 on Putin had sought to create a Eurasian Union as the centerpiece of his foreign policy agenda, an economic and security community embracing many of the former Soviet republics under Russian leadership, which could counterbalance the influence of the EU and NATO and forestall further Western encroachment in the region. With Belarus and most of the Central Asian states already on board, Ukraine's adherence remained the key to its success, and Putin had been assiduously cultivating a vacillating Yanukovich to draw him in. Yanukovich's failure to sign a much-discussed Association Agreement with the European Union, which many hoped would open the prospect of a more promising European future for Ukraine, triggered a major uprising in Kiev's Maidan Square, the flight of Yanukovich to Russia, and the emergence of a new leadership in Kiev. Furious at the apparent defeat of his plans, Putin launched a massive propaganda campaign to denounce what he alleged was a fascist coup in Kiev and unleashed a sudden covert occupation of the Crimean Peninsula by "little green men," staged a hasty referendum to legitimize the Russian occupation, and formally incorporated Crimea

³⁵ The Putin leadership had long viewed the "color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine as Western inspired and feared their contagion on Russian society. See G. Lapidus, "Between Assertiveness and Insecurity: Russian Elite Attitudes and the Russia-Georgia Crisis," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 23 (2007): 138–55. This attitude reflected an unwillingness to respect the agency of former Soviet republics and a refusal to acknowledge that some of them might choose to follow a Western model rather than a Russian one.

into the Russian Federation.³⁶ Alleging that an illegitimate and fascist junta in Kiev threatened the safety and rights of the Russian-speaking population, the Russian government went further to lend critical political and military support and leadership to a separatist movement in Eastern Ukraine, which established limited control over part of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and proclaimed the creation of independent People's Republics. While continuing to deny any Russian military role in the conflict, in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, Putin and others in the Russian leadership framed their actions as efforts to restore "Novorossia" in territories they claimed as historically part of the Russian empire.

These actions, in violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity, of the Budapest Agreement, and of a whole series of international agreements concluded since World War II—and indeed their explicit repudiation—constituted the most serious threat to European security in the postwar era. In part, Putin's actions were an effort to strike back at the West for what he had long considered disregard for Russian interests and grievances. But what was also now at stake, in Putin's view, was not only a geo-political competition between two camps but also a civilizational struggle on behalf of a "Russian world" with its own unique history, values and religious traditions, and indeed a world which extended beyond the borders of Russia itself and included all who shared its civilization. In statements that evoked unpleasant memories of German policies in the 1930s, Putin's new doctrine now proclaimed both the right and the obligation of the Russian state to protect and defend its compatriots, vaguely defined.

This official support of a conservative Russian nationalism proclaimed the need for a strong centralized state with power concentrated in the hands of a single leader, supported by the Orthodox Church, as the only bulwark against threats from outside. Within Russia itself new laws would further undermine most remnants of federalism; as one specialist put it, "the regions will in fact lose their title of subjects of

³⁶ The Russian occupation of Crimea was a particularly alarming development for the Crimean Tatar population, which had experienced brutal treatment during the Soviet period and had enjoyed greater freedom under Ukrainian rule in Crimea.

the Federation and be converted into only objects of administration from the center.”³⁷ Regional policy would now be aimed at promoting the national interests of the Russian Federation. The study of Russian language is to be aggressively promoted, while non-Russian language education, according to some officials, is now a luxury Russia can’t afford.³⁸

The new nationalist discourse also curtailed earlier controversies about Russia’s identity and now insisted upon a single interpretation of twentieth century Russian history, excluding discussion of sensitive issues, and especially those surrounding World War II. Finally, it sought to distance Russia culturally from Western ideas and values now considered offensive or even subversive, with new laws targeting Western NGOs and individuals labelled “agents of foreign influence.” Accompanying these developments has been increased pressure on theater and the arts, and harassment of directors and productions whose works “offended the faith” of believers.

While it is difficult to predict how much further Putin intends to promote this anti-Western Russian nationalism to build domestic political support, it is already having far-reaching repercussions for both domestic and foreign policy.

³⁷ P. Goble, “New Regional Policy Draft Pushing Russia toward Hyper-Centralized ‘Post-Federalism,’ Shtepa Says,” June 1, 2015, windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2015/06/new-regional-policy-draft-pushing.html.

³⁸ windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2015/06/moscow-officials-say-non-russian.html.

Public Memory and the Difficulty of Overcoming the Communist Legacy

Poland and Russia in Comparative Perspective

MARK KRAMER

In a televised ceremony at the Kremlin in Moscow on November 2, 2007, Russian president Vladimir Putin announced that he had awarded a posthumous Hero of Russia plaque and Gold Star medal to George Koval, an American technician who had been assigned by the U.S. Army during World War II to the Manhattan Project, the U.S. government's top-secret program to build a nuclear bomb. Koval, it turned out, was also working at the time as a spy for the Soviet military intelligence service, operating under the codename "Delmar."¹ He smuggled highly sensitive information about nuclear weapons technology to the Stalinist regime in Moscow. At the Kremlin ceremony honoring Koval, Putin warmly described him as "our comrade" and extolled him for his

¹ U.S. counterintelligence agencies had known about Koval's espionage since 1947, but the first time his name was publicly linked to Soviet military intelligence was in 1981 in the memoir *Utoli moi pechali* (*Ease My Sorrows*), by Lev Kopelev, a Soviet dissident who in the late 1940s had been a Gulag prisoner assigned to identify voices on intercepted phone calls. One of the intercepted phone calls referred to Koval as a Soviet military spy who had infiltrated the Manhattan Project, and Kopelev accurately recounted the episode in *Utoli moi pechali*. That episode had been described at greater length in the original version of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *V krug pevom* (*In the First Circle*), which was completed in the late 1950s after Solzhenitsyn had been a fellow prisoner with Kopelev in the Gulag who was also assigned to the voice-identification effort. At the publisher's insistence, the first published edition of the book (appearing in 1968) omitted this episode, among others. The full text was restored when the original edition of the book was published in Moscow in 1990. However, neither Kopelev nor Solzhenitsyn linked Koval to the "Delmar" codename. Koval's identity as "Delmar" was first publicly disclosed in a little-noticed article in the Russian military newspaper *Krasnaia zvezda* on July 23, 2007, seven months after Koval died in Russia.

“immense contribution to the strengthening of our country’s defense capacity.”²

Because Koval’s work on behalf of the Soviet Union had gained little public attention before, the official news clips of the award ceremony attracted considerable press attention. Oddly, though, journalists who covered the event failed to ask why Putin, as president of post-Soviet Russia, was lauding someone who gave such valuable help to the odious dictatorship of Joseph Stalin. One might assume that by November 2007, nearly sixteen years after the Soviet Union was divided into fifteen separate countries (including Russia), Russian leaders would no longer proudly describe a Stalinist agent as “our comrade” and explicitly associate their country with the monstrous policies of the Stalin era. Surely no leader of current-day Germany would even think of praising or bestowing posthumous honors on a former U.S. citizen who eagerly colluded with the Nazi regime. Nor would most Germans nowadays regard such people as their “comrades.”

Putin’s decision to honor Koval for his service to Stalin is symptomatic of a broader problem in Russia—the failure to come fully to terms with the Soviet past. When Dmitry Medvedev served as Russian president from 2008 to 2012, he forthrightly condemned the crimes committed by Stalin, and even Putin has occasionally been willing to acknowledge the wanton cruelty of Stalin’s regime. Nevertheless, their scattered statements about Stalin’s atrocities have been outweighed by the whitewashing that has been all too common under Putin. Starting in the late 1980s under Mikhail Gorbachev and continuing in the 1990s under Boris Yeltsin, leaders in Moscow cast light on the appalling events of the Stalin era, stirring great public interest, at least for a while. But that process of historical reckoning was never completed, and it has been partly reversed since Putin took over from Yeltsin as Russian

² See William J. Broad, “A Spy’s Path: Iowa to A-Bomb to Kremlin Honor,” *New York Times*, November 12, 2007, A1, A10. Broad mistakenly claims that this televised ceremony marked the first public disclosure of Koval’s secret work. In fact, Koval’s role as a Soviet spy had been publicly disclosed more than twenty-five years earlier but had drawn very little attention. I notified the *New York Times* about Broad’s error, but unfortunately the paper did not publish a correction.

president at the end of 1999. The problem is not a lack of information per se about Stalinist atrocities. Scholars and other experts in Russia (and abroad) have produced overwhelming evidence of the millions killed under Stalin and have meticulously analyzed the repressive apparatus that served the dictator's whims. All of this information is readily available—in print, online, and in archives—to those in Russia who want to see it. Instead, the problem is a lack of commitment on the part of the Russian government that has fueled a wider indifference and lack of interest on the part of the Russian public.

To be sure, the task of confronting unpleasant historical episodes is difficult for any country, even the long-established democracies. Germany, France, Austria, Japan, and the United States are among the countries that have had spotty records at best in coming to terms with horrendous events of the past. Considering that only two decades have passed since the end of communism, it is hardly surprising that most of the former communist countries have not yet been able to make a full reckoning with their own histories of repression, violence, and social degradation.

Even though the process of coming to terms with the past has been a formidable one for Western countries, it has been even more onerous in former communist countries, especially Russia, which took on the role of the “legal successor state” to the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, a status that, for some Russian leaders and elites, tends to blur Russia with the USSR. In Russia, as in other countries around the world, public memory has emerged in part from a competition among elites—a competition that Putin has sought to control. This essay provides a comparative assessment of the problems that Western democracies and former communist countries have experienced as they try to reckon with the past. The discussions of former East-bloc countries focus, in particular, on two cases: the highly charged (and often politicized) debates in Poland about historical memory of the communist era, and the Russian government's attempts to control public memory of the Soviet era and use it in the service of Putin's political goals.

The Experience of Western Countries

All of the leading Western democracies have encountered problems in coming fully to terms with abominable events of the recent past, despite the passage of considerable time and change of generations.

Even in Germany, the country that is often cited as the model of how societies can try to face up to unspeakable crimes, the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) was far from smooth or easy. More than two decades had to elapse after World War II before the majority of West Germans truly acknowledged the full horror and magnitude of Nazi Germany's crimes. In the late 1940s and 1950s, surveys conducted by U.S. and British occupation forces in western Germany revealed that a significant percentage of Germans still looked favorably on Nazism.³ In eight surveys of a random sample of 1,200 West German adults from May 1951 to December 1952, an average of 41 percent saw "more good than evil" in Nazi ideas, versus only 36 percent who saw "more evil than good." Far from decreasing, the percentage of West Germans expressing a positive view of Nazism grew considerably throughout the first half of the 1950s, a trend that U.S. diplomats based in West Germany found "disconcerting."⁴

Not until the latter half of the 1960s, under pressure of the younger generation, did many West Germans begin coming to terms with the appalling nature of the Nazi regime's mass atrocities and genocide. (East Germany was a stark contrast. The communist regime in East Germany never did anything to try to atone for the Nazi regime's crimes.⁵) In West Germany, the official reckoning with the past took a long while, but the government there, to its great credit, did an immense amount after the late 1960s to condemn the Nazi regime, to wipe out the Nazi legacy, and to compensate the surviving victims. West German chancellor Willy Brandt's famous gesture in December 1970 at the monument

³ Anna J. Merritt and Richard L. Merritt, eds., *Public Opinion in Semisovereign Germany: The HICOG Surveys, 1949–1955* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 6–12 as well as numerous reports in pt. 2.

⁴ Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, Reactions Analysis Staff, "The Present Status of 'Neo-Nazism' in West Germany," Report No. 119, February 28, 1952.

⁵ Thomas C. Fox, *Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1999).

to the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto uprising, as he fell to his knees in sorrow and expressed unqualified condemnation of Germany's annihilation of Jews, is still widely cited as a gesture to be emulated. Even observers who are wary of taking for granted Germans' reckoning with the past are apt to concede that Germany by now has attained greater success, especially in dealing with the Nazi past (somewhat less so with the communist period in East Germany), than one might have expected from the trends during the first postwar decade.⁶

In France nowadays, the situation is less auspicious. Even during the outpouring of radical student protests in Paris in the late 1960s against the government of Charles de Gaulle, the historical myths carefully nurtured by postwar French governments remained largely intact. Even as late as January 2011, a street in the French town of Tremblois-lès-Carignan was still named after Marshal Philippe Pétain, the French military official who headed the Vichy regime set up by Nazi Germany in 1940.⁷ Many French citizens today are still reluctant to look closely at the Vichy period and the widespread collaboration that occurred. French politicians still routinely embrace myths about the French resistance movement, portraying it as the dominant element in France during World War II and claiming that collaborationists were only a small minority and that France did not abet the Holocaust. The reality is that collaboration and indifference were the norm in France, the resistance was relatively weak and ineffective, and French police actively abetted the deportations of French Jews, causing the deaths of tens of thousands.⁸ A full reckoning with France's wartime past has remained elusive even in the twenty-first century.

⁶ Jan-Werner Mueller, "Has Germany Really Come to Terms with Its Past?" *Guardian*, October 21, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/oct/21/has-germany-come-to-terms-past>.

⁷ John Tagliabue, "Tremblois-lès-Carignan Journal: Both Hero and Traitor, but No Longer on the Map," *New York Times*, January 3, 2011, A8. The name had been given to the street in honor of Pétain's service in World War I, but it was not changed after his career took an ignominious turn in World War II.

⁸ Peter Davies, *France and the Second World War: Occupation, Collaboration, and Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2000); Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 102–137; Simon Kitson, "The Police and the Deportation of Jews from the Bouches-du-Rhône in August and September 1942," *Modern and Contemporary France* 5, no. 3 (August 1997), 421–44; and Bernd Kasten, "Gute Franzosen":

In Austria, many people still claim that their country was a victim of Nazi aggression rather than an enthusiastic participant in the Third Reich and its atrocities. Although some Austrians opposed Nazism in the 1930s and early 1940s, a substantial majority ardently welcomed Adolf Hitler's Anschluss. For a long while after World War II, Cold War pressures induced Western governments to go along with these myths. After the signing of the Austrian State Treaty in May 1955 and the establishment of Austria as a neutral state, the task of coming to terms with the past largely fell off the agenda in Austria, leaving the old myths intact.⁹ The advent of Social Democratic governments did little to alter the situation, except perhaps to foster a new myth that Austria was a beacon of morality in a Europe divided by the Cold War. The fact that Kurt Waldheim could gain election as Austrian president in 1986, despite revelations of his knowledge of and apparent complicity in Nazi atrocities during his wartime service in the Wehrmacht, was indicative of the lack of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Austria. Even now, Austria has done almost nothing to own up to its central role in Nazi rule—a marked contrast to Germany.

Similarly, in Japan, political leaders still frequently downplay the barbaric actions of Japanese troops in China, Korea, Manchuria, and other areas in the 1930s and 1940s. Japanese citizens are inclined to “remember” their country as a victim in 1945 of the only two occasions when nuclear bombs have been used in war. But they fail to acknowledge the abominable crimes of the Imperial Japanese government that preceded the dropping of the bombs—crimes that included grisly torture and wanton brutality and that led to the deaths of millions.¹⁰ The countries that were under Japanese occupation, such as China and Korea, often denounce Japan for whitewashing the past, but these countries have their own selective memories of the wartime years. They

Die französische Polizei und die deutsche Besatzungsmacht im besetzten Frankreich 1940–44 (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1993).

⁹ Heidemarie Uhl, “The Politics of Memory: Austria’s Perception of the Second World War and the National Socialist Period,” in *Austrian Historical Memory & National Identity*, ed. Günter Bischof and Anton Pelinka, Contemporary Austrian Studies, vol. 5 (Vienna: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 163–85.

¹⁰ Herbert Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).

conveniently fail to acknowledge their high rate of collaboration with the Japanese occupation.

In Korea, for example, the Japanese military presence was relatively light because so many Koreans were willing to go along with the occupation—a point that many Koreans nowadays (in both the North and the South) airbrush out of the historical picture, including in textbooks for schools and universities.¹¹ Similarly, the Chinese communist regime has demanded Japan’s “atonement” for the past not so much because of the merits of the issue as because of a desire to use the question of history in realpolitik-style as a “weapon” against Japan and a means of generating popular support at home.¹² Even as the communist authorities in China continue to denounce Japan’s treatment of wartime history, they themselves engage in systematic whitewashing of the atrocities perpetrated by Mao Zedong and suppress any public discussion of the massacre carried out in Beijing by Chinese troops at the regime’s behest in June 1989.

Yet, even though abuses of history and whitewashing have occurred on all sides in East Asia, the primary responsibility for coming to terms with the horrors of the Sino-Japanese War and Asia-Pacific War ultimately lies with Japan. East Asia has experienced many instances of mass slaughter and cruelty over the centuries, but the Japanese occupation of China, Korea, and other countries in the region in the late 1930s and 1940s was arguably the worst ever. Until Japanese governments of all stripes unequivocally acknowledge the magnitude of these crimes, history will remain a bitter point of contention in East Asia and will take its toll on Japanese society.

In the United States as well, many tragic aspects of history over the past two centuries—the enslavement of blacks, the many decades of violent racial segregation that followed the Civil War, the brutal campaigns against American Indians, and the internment of

¹¹ Joyce Lebra, *Japanese-Trained Armies in Southeast Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

¹² Tim Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); and Yoshiko Nozaki, *War Memory, Nationalism, and Education in Post-War Japan, 1945–2007: The Japanese History Textbook Controversy and Ienaga Saburo’s Court Challenges* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

Japanese-Americans at the start of World War II, among others—have often been glossed over in history textbooks, public discussions, holidays, and museums. The shortcomings of historical reckoning in the United States are vividly illustrated by the fact that one of the main gestures of reconciliation for American Indians has been the permission granted to them to operate gambling casinos on their reservations.

On racial questions, the inadequacy of attempts in the United States to come to terms with the past has exacted a higher and more debilitating price. The American Civil War, which ultimately ended the slavery of blacks, was followed by a decade of Reconstruction that was intended to force the Confederate states to acknowledge the evil of slavery. After only a decade, however, Reconstruction was lifted by President Rutherford B. Hayes as part of a political deal. Consequently, the country as a whole, and especially the former Confederate states, never made a full reckoning with the abomination of slavery.¹³ For another ninety years, institutionalized racism in the form of segregation remained in place all over the South. White supremacist groups gained sway in Southern states, lynching thousands of blacks with impunity.¹⁴ Even today, long after segregation formally ended, race relations in the United States are still hindered and poisoned by the country's collective failure to come fully to terms with the horrors of slavery and segregation. If Reconstruction had been maintained for several decades or even longer, race relations in the United States nowadays would undoubtedly be far better.

Historical Reckoning in Former Communist Countries

Difficult as the process of historical reckoning may be for many Western countries, it has been even more arduous in former communist countries, all of which were left on their own after the demise of

¹³ Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); and Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

¹⁴ Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

communism. The allied occupations of Germany and Japan after World War II contributed only a small amount to the process of historical reckoning in those countries (and indeed in some instances set it back), but the occupation authorities did establish certain parameters that were of long-term benefit. By contrast, in all of the former communist countries, the task of coming to terms with the recent past was entirely up to the individual governments and societies. In many cases, especially in the former Soviet Union, powerful elites who were still on the scene had a stake in thwarting any real attempt to come to terms with the past.

Poland

In Poland over the past quarter-century, the process of historical reckoning has been marked by controversy and recriminations not only about the communist period but also about the years that preceded it. Emotional and often politically charged debates have arisen about both periods, albeit along different tracks with little or no connection between the two. The main focus in this chapter is on the communist period, but recent debates in Poland about Poles' behavior toward Jews during and immediately after World War II have been so wrenching and have played such a crucial role in political battles over historical memory that some discussion of them is warranted here.

The main impetus for reassessments of Poles' complicity in the annihilation of Polish Jews has come from the work of Jan Gross, an eminent Polish-born historian who has lived in the United States since 1969 but who still spends a good deal of time in Poland. In three hard-hitting, well-documented books published over a span of eleven years, beginning with *Sąsiedzi* (Neighbors) in 2000, Gross has systematically punctured long-held myths about the treatment of Polish Jews by their fellow Poles during and immediately after World War II.¹⁵

¹⁵ Jan Tomasz Gross, *Sąsiedzi: Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2000), published in English in 2001 by Princeton University Press as *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*; Jan Tomasz Gross, *Wokół Sąsiadów: Polemiki i wyjaśnienia* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2003), which contains his responses to the furor about *Neighbors*; Jan Tomasz Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2006), published in Polish in 2008 by Znak as

In *Sąsiedzi* he recounted how in the eastern Polish town of Jedwabne in July 1941, the local Polish residents turned *en masse* against their Jewish neighbors and brutally killed hundreds of them. The book made clear that although an influx of Wehrmacht troops into the area two weeks earlier as part of Operation Barbarossa provided an important context for the massacre of Jews, the killing itself was perpetrated by local Poles, often with gratuitous cruelty. This instance of mass violence, Gross argued, was one of numerous pogroms carried out by Poles against Jews in the summer of 1941.

Gross's book struck a raw nerve in Poland and generated more than two years of fierce debate and recriminations.¹⁶ Some Poles who had not even read *Sąsiedzi* were quick to condemn it, whereas others who did read the book took issue with Gross's account of the massacre or with his interpretations of why it happened.¹⁷ Still others defended Gross, arguing that *Sąsiedzi* was a book that "had to be written and was absolutely necessary" to force Poles to "face up to the painful truth of Jedwabne."¹⁸ Many of the leading experts in Poland on the history of Polish Jewry, such as Dariusz Stola, welcomed the ongoing debate and maintained that much greater research should be undertaken to

Strach: Antysemityzm w Polsce tuż po wojnie. Historia moralnej zapaści; Jan Tomasz Gross, *Złote żniwa: Rzecz o tym, co się działo na obrzeżach zagłady Żydów* (Kraków: Znak, 2011), published in English as Jan Tomasz Gross with Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁶ For an excellent review of the debate, see Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic, eds., *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). See also Andrzej Paczkowski, "Debata wokół 'Sąsiadów: Próba wstępnej typologii,'" *Rzeczpospolita* (Warsaw), March 24, 2001, A6.

¹⁷ Natalia Aleksyńska, "Polish Historians Respond to Jedwabne," in Robert Cherry and Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, eds., *Rethinking Poles and Jews: Troubled Past, Brighter Future* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 164–88.

¹⁸ Krystyna Skarżyńska, "Zbiorowa wyobraźnia, zbiorowa wina," *Gazeta wyborcza* (Warsaw), 24 November 2000, 19; Dawid Warszawski, "Odpowiedzialność i jej brak," *Gazeta wyborcza*, December 9–10, 2000, 20–21; Jacek Korczewski, "Mord rytualny," *Wprost* (Poznań), December 10, 2000, 36–37; Dariusz Czaja, "To nie 'oni,' niestety," *Gazeta wyborcza*, December 16–17, 2000, 20–21; Andrzej Zbikowski, "Nie było rozkazu," *Rzeczpospolita*, January 4, 2001, A6–A7; Dawid Warszawski, "Mowa pokutna: Bez także," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 9, 2001, 18; and Dawid Warszawski, "Dwie Polski w Jedwabnem," *Wprost*, July 21, 2002, 24–26.

explore the topic more deeply and verify Gross's findings. Some of the discussion in Poland at times took on ugly nationalist and anti-Semitic overtones, and several political commentators, especially those affiliated with the extreme-right Radio Maryja, invoked hoary notions of Judeo-Communism (*Żydokomuna*) and sought to exculpate the attackers.¹⁹

Nevertheless, despite the viciousness of some of the commentaries, the debate overall had a cathartic effect in Polish society, especially after the Polish parliament officially authorized the recently established Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [IPN]) to produce a comprehensive study of the Jedwabne pogrom and the circumstances surrounding it. Two well-respected IPN scholars, Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak, jointly coordinated the institute's work on the matter, and in 2002 they published two massive volumes—the first a compendium of authoritative essays by leading experts and the other a collection of annotated documents from various Polish archives—that confirmed Gross's basic findings but reduced the total number of deaths and added a wealth of detail.²⁰ (Later research by the IPN and other scholars resulted in somewhat higher estimates of the numbers of victims and perpetrators, bringing the tallies closer to those originally cited by Gross.) The IPN's successful performance in this high-profile case helped to cement its reputation early on as a non-partisan, professional body that could facilitate historical reckoning in Poland even on the most sensitive topics.

Gross's next two books, *Strach* (Fear) and *Złote żniwa* (Golden Harvest), extended his reassessments of the history of Polish Jews to the late

¹⁹ Jerzy Robert Nowak, *100 kłamstw J. T. Grossa o żydowskich sąsiadach w Jedwabnem* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo von Borowiecki, 2001); Henryk Pajak, *Jedwabne geszeftły* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Retro, 2001); Lech Z. Niekraś, *Operacja Jedwabne—mity i fakty* (Wrocław: Nortom, 2001); Antoni Macierewicz, "Rewolucja nihilizmu," *Głos—Tygodnik katolicko-narodowy* (Warsaw), February 3, 2001, 2; Tomasz Strzembosz, "Przemilczana kolaboracja," *Rzeczpospolita*, January 28–29, 2001, A6–A7; Tomasz Strzembosz, "Inny obraz sąsiadów," *Rzeczpospolita*, March 31–April 1, 2001, A6–A7; Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, "Kłopoty z kuracją szokową," *Rzeczpospolita*, January 5, 2001, A6; and Piotr Gontarczyk, "Gross kontra fakty," *Zycie* (Warsaw), January 31, 2001, 4.

²⁰ Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak, eds., *Wokół Jedwabnego*, Vol. I: *Studia*, and Vol. II: *Dokumenty* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, 2002).

wartime years and early postwar period. In *Strach*, he discussed how Poles seized the property of local Jews after they were deported to Nazi death camps or shot by Nazi police battalions. The book then focused in depth on the early postwar period, showing that even after more than 90 percent of Polish Jews had been murdered in the Holocaust, many Polish Christians reacted with hostility when surviving Jews returned home. Some of the Poles had seized Jewish property and housing and were worried that their claims would be challenged, whereas others simply regretted seeing Jews back in their midst. The hostility at times gave rise to gruesome anti-Semitic outbursts, including a pogrom in Kielce in July 1946 that left forty-two Jews dead.²¹ Significant as the Kielce massacre was in the scale of its bloodshed and ferocity of its violence, the cumulative death toll of other attacks against Jews in postwar Poland, including atrocities perpetrated by armed nationalist guerrillas, was many times higher. Gross estimated that up to 1,500 Polish Jews were killed by their fellow Poles after the war.

The reaction in Poland to *Strach* among professional historians (including some prominent Jews) as well as the wider public was often uneasy. Although most scholars accepted the basic facts in Gross's narrative, many contested his interpretations. Some argued that he had been too sweeping in his characterizations of Polish society and had attributed anti-Semitic motives to people whose actions in some cases might have stemmed mainly from greed or criminality coarsened by the war.²² A senior figure in the Polish Catholic church went so far as to accuse Gross of stoking anti-Semitism by "unfairly maligning the

²¹ For relevant archival documents and analyses, see the two large volumes put out by the IPN: Łukasz Kamiński and Jan Żaryn, eds., *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2006); and Leszek Bukowski, Andrzej Jankowski, and Jan Żaryn, eds., *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2008). See also Stanisław Meducki and Zenon Wrona, eds., *Antyżydowskie wydarzenia kieleckie 4 lipca 1946 roku*, 2 vols. (Kielce: Kieleckie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 1992).

²² For an overview, see Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, "Coming to Terms with Anti-Semitism: Jan T. Gross's Writings and the Construction of Cultural Trauma in Post-Communist Poland," *European Studies* 30, no. 1 (May 2013): 125–50. See also the interview with Gross in Małgorzata I. Niemczyńska, "Antysemityzm straszny jak Stalin," *Gazeta wyborcza*, January 24, 2008, 22.

entire Polish nation.”²³ Both Gross and his Polish publisher, the academic press Znak, rejected most of the criticism and stressed the need for Poles collectively to come to terms with “the most vexing issues in [Polish] history.”

The furor surrounding *Strach* gained even greater intensity with Gross’s third book, *Złote żniwa*, which underscored the callousness and antipathy of many Poles toward Jews during the war even as the Holocaust was taking its grisly toll. Gross cataloged instances in which Poles living near Treblinka, Chelmno, and other extermination camps stripped the clothes off Jewish corpses and stole gold fillings from their teeth. He described how Poles waited for their Jewish neighbors to be shot or deported to the gas chambers and then laid claim to their homes and possessions. The small percentage of Poles who had tried to save Jews from Nazi death squads were ostracized and even physically attacked and forced into exile by their fellow Poles after the war.

The response to *Złote żniwa* in Poland was swift in coming. Once again, many Poles alleged that Gross had dwelt too much on pathologies that were outgrowths of a rampantly destructive war and had therefore “drawn unfair generalizations.” Much of the debate about the book was substantive (if often emotional), but some commentators engaged in ad hominem attacks against Gross, often with anti-Semitic overtones.²⁴ Gross and Znak responded that the criticisms missed the whole point of the book, which was never intended to focus mainly on the actions of Poles who helped to save Jews (some 6,200 honored by Yad Vashem). The aim, instead, was to show that many Poles behaved with unspeakable cruelty both during and after the war.

Even as Gross’s books touched off recriminations and disputes, they stirred greater public curiosity about the history of Polish Jews and spurred many Poles to seek to learn more about the topic. One of the byproducts was the opening in Warsaw in October 2014 of a state-of-the-art Museum of the History of Polish Jews (Muzeum Historii Żydów

²³ Małgorzata I. Niemczyńska, “Żydzi nas atakują! Trzeba się bronić,” *Gazeta syborcza*, February 11, 2008, 7.

²⁴ “Internauci chcą zablokować publikację książki Grossa: Grożą bojkotem wydawnictwa,” *Rzeczpospolita*, January 10, 2011, 4.

Polskich), which presents not only a thorough overview of the destruction of Polish Jewry in the Holocaust but also a comprehensive history of Jewish life in Poland from medieval times on.²⁵ The construction and initial operating costs (320,000,000 złotys) were funded by two government bodies (Poland's Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the municipal government of Warsaw) and by the Jewish Historical Institute (a non-governmental organization), but the museum operates autonomously under the supervision of highly respected academic experts, with Dariusz Stola as its founding director.²⁶ Many groups of Polish schoolchildren have visited the museum and seen its multi-media exhibits, and it has also now become a popular destination for Polish and foreign tourists.

Despite greater public interest in the history of Polish-Jewish relations, the issue has remained politically sensitive in Poland. In an article published in September 2015 in the German newspaper *Die Welt*, Gross maintained that Poles had killed more Jews during World War II than they had killed Germans.²⁷ He contended that Poles had killed roughly 17,000 Germans during the initial warfare against the Wehrmacht in September 1939, 5,000 more over the next four years, and another 5,000 during the August 1944 Warsaw uprising. Gross said the total number of Jews killed by Poles—by ordinary citizens as well as police, paramilitary units, army soldiers, and nationalist guerrillas—was several times higher than the number of Germans killed.

Translated excerpts of Gross's article quickly gained wide circulation in Poland and in some cases were deliberately distorted by far-right nationalist commentators to suggest that in Gross's view the Germans had killed fewer Jews than the Poles had.²⁸ But even if no distortions

²⁵ Joanna Podgórska, "Muzeum życia: O tym, jak powstawało Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich, jak zostało zorganizowane i jakie niesie przesłanie, opowiada Marian Turski," *Polityka* (Warsaw), October 22–28, 2014, 108–9; and the guidebook *1000 lat historii Żydów polskich. Miniprzewodnik po ekspozycji* (Warsaw: Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN, 2014).

²⁶ Kancelaria Sejmu, Biuro Komisji Sejmowych, *Pełny zapis przebiegu posiedzenia Komisji Kultury i Środków Przekazu (nr 96) z dnia 25 września 2013* (Warsaw: Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polski, September 2013).

²⁷ "Die Osteuropäer haben kein Schamgefühl," *Die Welt* (Berlin), September 14, 2015, 4.

²⁸ See, for example, Jerzy Robert Nowak, "Jak prowokator J.T. Gross odsłonił się do końca," *Serwis Informacyjny BIBUŁY*, October 3, 2015.

had taken place, Gross's claims were bound to be controversial in a country like Poland that had long prided itself on having fought against Germany throughout the war. So vehement was the public reaction that Poland's chief state prosecutor launched a criminal investigation in mid-October 2015 to see whether libel charges should be brought against Gross for having "publicly insulted the Polish nation"—charges that, if upheld, could potentially lead to a three-year prison sentence.²⁹

The criticism of Gross escalated after the rightwing populist Law and Justice (Prawo i sprawiedliwość [PiS]) Party of Jarosław Kaczyński won a decisive victory in Poland's parliamentary elections in October 2015, allowing it to form a government on its own. Kaczyński had headed a coalition government from 2005 to 2007 but had then been in the political wilderness for nearly a decade. In May 2015, Andrzej Duda, Kaczyński's protégé in PiS, won the Polish presidential election, and then six months later PiS's overwhelming victory in the parliamentary elections solidified its control over Poland's political system. Both Duda (who took office in August 2015) and the new PiS government endorsed the investigation of Gross.

Subsequently, in January 2016, Duda called for the revocation of the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit that had been awarded to Gross by the Polish government in 1996.³⁰ That proposal immediately triggered a backlash in Poland among scholars and political commentators, who decried PiS's "stupid and harmful" efforts to use history as a "political weapon." Two open letters to Duda and the government, signed by distinguished Polish historians, warned that such a move would "tarnish Poland's image in the world" and be a "national embarrassment."³¹ They condemned the president's "worrisome and heavy-handed" insistence on a "uniform historical perspective." Duda himself had claimed that his move against Gross was part of a wider

²⁹ "Jest śledztwo w sprawie słów Jana T. Grossa—Zarzut: znieważenie narodu polskiego," *Gazeta wyborcza*, October 15, 2015, 6.

³⁰ Adam Leszczyński, "PiS kole order prof. Jana Tomasza Grossa: I chcę mu odebrać Krzyż Kawalerski," *Gazeta wyborcza*, February 9, 2016, 3; and Paweł Wroński, "Zabrać 'zdrajcy' order?" *Gazeta wyborcza*, February 11, 2016, 7.

³¹ "Apel do prezydenta przeciw postępowaniu ws. odebrania orderu Grossowi," Polish Press Agency, February 12, 2016; and "Prof. Gross zasłużył na ten order: Kancelaria Prezydenta chce reglamentować wolność słowa?" *Gazeta wyborcza*, February 11, 2016.

“offensive” he would be spearheading to burnish Poland’s image in the face of “malevolent” attempts to “cast aspersions” on Poland’s historical record and its current global standing. “Historical politics,” he asserted in early 2016, “should be conducted by the Polish state as an element of the construction of our international position.”³² Yet by trying to expunge all the unpleasant aspects of Poland’s treatment of Jews from public memory, Duda undermined what he was trying to achieve and gave the impression that his goal was to sanitize history, not clarify it.

Political agendas have also been a salient factor in retrospective debates about Poland’s communist past. In Poland, unlike in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, the end of communism came relatively gradually. The Round Table Talks from February to April 1989, which led to the partly free parliamentary elections of June 1989 that enabled Solidarity to form a non-communist government under Tadeusz Mazowiecki two months later, were held at a time when communism still existed in Eastern Europe, the Warsaw Pact was still functioning, and considerable uncertainty still existed both in Poland and elsewhere in the bloc about the bounds of Soviet tolerance.³³ These circumstances induced Solidarity to agree to certain important compromises in exchange for the formation of Mazowiecki’s government in August 1989, notably to allow General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the country’s long-time political and military ruler who had introduced martial law in Poland in December 1981, to remain as president, and General Czesław Kiszczak, the long-time minister of internal affairs, to remain in charge of that ministry.

Ensnared in those posts over the next several months, Jaruzelski and Kiszczak secretly allowed the removal and destruction of some of the communist-era files, including state security records that were overseen by Kiszczak’s ministry. By mid-1990, after both Kiszczak and

³² “Prezydent: Państwo polskie powinno realizować ‘ofensywną’ politykę historyczną,” *Rzeczpospolita*, February 16, 2016, 4.

³³ The literature on the negotiated end of Communism in Poland is immense. See, for example, Witold Szalmonowicz, ed., *Porozumienia Okrągłego Stołu: Warszawa 6 lutego–5 kwietnia 1989 r.* (Olsztyn: NSZZ “Solidarność,” 1989); Andrzej Garlicki, *Rycerze Okrągłego Stołu* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 2004); and Jan Skórzynski, *Ugoda i rewolucja: Władza i opozycja, 1985–1989* (Warsaw: Presspublica, 1995), 182–254.

Jaruzelski had been ousted for good from any governmental positions, rumors were circulating in Poland that the most incriminating materials had been weeded out and destroyed and that counterfeit documents had been planted.³⁴ Although some of these allegations were exaggerated or false, there is no question that some destruction of secret police records and other sensitive documents occurred. Moreover, conclusive evidence surfaced in February 2016 that when Kiszczak left office in 1990 he took with him a large quantity of highly classified documents and stored them at his home illegally until his death at age ninety in November 2015.³⁵ It is unclear what, if anything, he did with the documents during the twenty-five years they were in his possession, but he presumably planned to exploit them for blackmail purposes if necessary. Regardless of the motivation, the disclosure that he took these extremely sensitive materials is yet another factor that has trammled even the sincerest of efforts in Poland to come to terms with the communist past.

Moreover, even though Poland's transition to a market economy was far swifter and more successful than in most former communist countries, dislocation during the transition fueled a perception that the Round Table had been merely a conspiracy among elites to maintain an inequitable power structure in Poland. Many Poles felt that communist elites had used their positions of influence to acquire economic assets that enabled them to live in luxury and to remain dominant in society during the postcommunist era.³⁶ Many of these perceptions were hyperbolic, but the notion that key elites did what they could to remain influential after communism is both true and unsurprising. Unfortunately, historical memory in Poland about the Round Table has

³⁴ Bartłomiej Kaminski, *The Collapse of State Socialism: The Case of Poland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Claudia Kundigraber, *Polens Weg in die Demokratie: der Runde Tisch und der unerwartete Machtwechsel* (Göttingen: Cuvillier, 1997); and Marjorie Castle, *Triggering Communism's Collapse: Perceptions and Power in Poland's Transition* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

³⁵ "List Czesława Kiszczaka: Dokumenty publikować po śmierci Lecha Wałęsy," *Rzeczpospolita*, February 22, 2016, 1.

³⁶ Andrzej Stankiewicz, "Nie wierzyli w wybory, większość dziś zmieniła zdanie," *Rzeczpospolita*, June 4, 2014, 13.

often been skewed for political reasons, generating acrimonious debate that sheds little light on the events themselves and that gets bogged down in conspiracy theories of various sorts, including about the April 2010 airplane crash. Generational change has not helped matters, in part because of the polarization of political life in Poland, which has tended to convert debates about historical matters into thinly veiled political battles, especially when PiS has been in power.

Beyond the question of how communism ended in Poland and the implications for power structures in Poland today, debates about historical memory of Polish communism have focused on the role of two important individuals who were on opposite sides in 1980–81: General Jaruzelski and Lech Wałęsa. To simplify slightly, the debate concerning Jaruzelski (who died in 2015) has boiled down to the question of whether he should be perceived as a hero or a traitor. Some views are more nuanced than that, but they tend to get submerged in the miasma of accusations and recriminations in what is often a politicized debate. Legal proceedings were under way against Jaruzelski from the early 1990s on for his role in two events—the shootings of workers on Poland’s Baltic coast in December 1970 and the imposition of martial law in late 1981. Although the latter charges against him were put on hold in 1996 by a leftwing parliament for nearly a decade, they were reinstated in 2005 and remained in place until his death a decade later.

Jaruzelski himself insisted that he had had no choice but to impose martial law in December 1981 as the “lesser of two evils,” that is, as an alternative to a Soviet invasion and military occupation of Poland. Jaruzelski acquired some prominent defenders from the ranks of those he once opposed, notably Adam Michnik, the former dissident intellectual and now long-time editor of *Gazeta wyborcza*. Michnik has staunchly supported Jaruzelski, often to the consternation of some of Michnik’s former associates. Jaruzelski, however, also has had plenty of detractors in Poland, some of whom have claimed that Soviet troops would not have invaded Poland in 1981 and that Jaruzelski imposed martial law simply to establish a militarized form of communist rule and resist any genuine compromise with Solidarity and the Catholic Church.

This debate has been unsatisfactory, in part because proponents of both of the extreme positions (Jaruzelski and Michnik on the one hand and Jaruzelski's bitterest opponents on the other) have been unconvincing.³⁷ To be sure, Jaruzelski's claims that he acted under enormous Soviet pressure are certainly true. The Soviet Politburo and Soviet High Command were exerting relentless pressure on Polish leaders. The Soviet Union deployed many divisions of combat-ready troops around Poland's borders and in the western USSR, conducted a long series of conspicuous Warsaw Pact and bilateral military exercises, informed Polish officials that elaborate plans had been drawn up for a Soviet-led invasion, undertook reconnaissance and other preparations to carry out those plans, and made repeated, vehement exhortations through bilateral and multilateral channels. These various actions, in combination, might well have caused Jaruzelski to fear that Soviet troops would invade Poland unless he imposed martial law. Whether Soviet leaders actually intended to invade is a very different matter. But regardless of what Soviet intentions truly were, the key point to bear in mind is that Jaruzelski and other senior Polish officials in 1980 and 1981 were not privy to the internal deliberations of the Soviet Politburo and could never be fully certain about Soviet intentions. Hence, Jaruzelski might have genuinely believed that an invasion would take place if a solution "from within" Poland did not materialize.

Nonetheless, even though Jaruzelski's memoirs accurately depict the excruciating pressure he was facing from the Soviet Union, his account of the crisis omits a crucial matter—namely, that as the decisive moment for the imposition of martial law approached in December 1981 he urged Moscow to send Soviet troops into Poland to bail him out. The reason that Jaruzelski was appointed head of the Polish United Workers' Party (the Communist Party) in mid-October 1981 is that Soviet leaders believed he would be willing to comply with

³⁷ This paragraph and the next four paragraphs are based on Mark Kramer, "The Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact, and the Polish Crisis of 1980–1981," in *The Solidarity Movement and Perspectives on the Last Decade of the Cold War*, ed. Lee Trepanier, Spasimir Domaradzki, and Jaclyn Stanke (Kraków: Krakowskie Towarzystwo Eduk, 2010), 27–67.

their demands for a crackdown. Jaruzelski did promptly move ahead with the final preparations for the “lesser of two evils”—that is, martial law—but he also began considering the possibility of relying on the “greater of two evils,” Soviet military intervention. His overtures about this option evidently began in late October 1981 and continued, with ever greater urgency, until the day martial law was introduced. Apparently, Jaruzelski by late 1981 had come to believe that the martial law operation would be unsuccessful unless it went hand-in-hand with external military intervention.

But if Jaruzelski’s version of events is problematic, the notion that the Soviet Union was willing to let Poland go its own way is even more dubious. This argument flies in the face of a vast amount of evidence. The first step the Soviet Politburo took in August 1980, after forming a special commission to deal with the Polish crisis, was to authorize the mobilization of a sizable number of Soviet tank and mechanized infantry divisions “in case military assistance is provided to Poland.” From August 1980 until the fall of 1981, Soviet leaders were fully prepared to send these divisions into Poland to help the Polish communist regime introduce martial law. The only reason the Soviet (and Czechoslovak and East German) divisions did not move into Poland is that whenever the Soviet Politburo stepped up its pressure and proposed the deployment of Soviet ground troops to facilitate a vigorous crackdown on the Polish opposition, Polish leaders warned that it would be better if Polish forces imposed martial law on their own. If the Poles had instead been willing to receive external military support during this period, Soviet Army units would have entered Poland to aid them in crushing Solidarity and restoring orthodox communist rule.

In short, the historical evidence reveals a nuanced picture—a picture in which Jaruzelski certainly was not a hero but was not altogether a villain, either. The basic problem is that he was operating in a context in which heroes would not have lasted long. Some of the hardline political and military alternatives to Jaruzelski, such as Tadeusz Grabski, Stefan Olszowski, and General Eugeniusz Molczyk, one or more of whom would have been brought in by the Soviet Union to replace Jaruzelski if he had failed to heed Soviet wishes, undoubtedly would have implemented a much harsher crackdown, killing larger numbers of people. Many Polish scholars are well aware of the nuances and have

published excellent analyses of the topic. But public debates in Poland about the history of that period have far too often become relentlessly politicized, omitting all the nuance.

Much the same is true about recent debates concerning the role of Lech Wałęsa in Polish history. Wałęsa has long been known as the founding leader of the Solidarity (*Solidarność*) trade union whose image scaling the shipyard fence in Gdańsk in August 1980 is still one of the best-known symbols of the Solidarity era both in Poland and abroad. But Wałęsa's term as president in postcommunist Poland, from December 1990 to December 1995, was marred by controversy and political infighting.³⁸ As early as 1992, rumors began to surface that Wałęsa had been an informant for Poland's communist-era Security Service (SB). But because those allegations initially came from Antoni Macierewicz, a senior official who had been engaged in an acrimonious feud with Wałęsa, most Poles tended to discount them. The accusations tarnished Wałęsa's legacy somewhat, but his image was still decidedly positive both in Poland and abroad. However, in the late 1990s, journalists and researchers in Poland claimed to have found further evidence that Wałęsa was an informant for the SB in the 1970s under the codename "Bolek"—charges endorsed by some of his former aides who had split with him in the 1990s. Although a Polish lustration court ruled in 2000 that Wałęsa had been falsely accused,³⁹ damaging rumors persisted.

The debate about Wałęsa took on a more politically charged tone after Lech Kaczyński was elected Polish president in 2005 and his twin brother, Jarosław, became prime minister in a PiS-headed coalition government. Lech Kaczyński had been a close aide of Wałęsa in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but the two men eventually had a bitter falling out.⁴⁰ As president, Kaczyński lent weight to the rumors about Wałęsa as "Bolek" and encouraged investigations of the matter by journalists

³⁸ Raymond Taras, *Consolidating Democracy in Poland* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996); and Hubert Tworzecki, *Parties and Politics in Post-1989 Poland* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

³⁹ "Orzeczenie sędziów Sądu Apelacyjnego w Warszawie wraz z uzasadnieniem wyroku w sprawie lustracyjnej Lecha Wałęsy," Sygn. akt V AL. 26100, August 11, 2000, Warsaw.

⁴⁰ Monika Nalepa, *Skeletons in the Closet: Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17–19.

and researchers, especially those associated with Poland's prestigious IPN, which until the Kaczyńskis came to power had been perceived as a strictly nonpartisan organization with a laudable record of confronting sensitive issues in Poland's past, such as the Jedwabne massacre. In 2008, two researchers at the IPN, Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk, published a 750-page book presenting evidence from the former SB archives, which they claimed showed that Wałęsa had been the SB informant "Bolek" from 1970 to 1976 and that later, as president, he had sought to cover up his earlier misdeeds.⁴¹ The evidence of Wałęsa's work as "Bolek" was largely persuasive, though the evidence also suggested that most of the information he provided to the SB was relatively innocuous (apart from a few cases when it may have been considerably more damaging). More troubling was the evidence that Wałęsa as president had relied on his intelligence chief to tamper with the files, an action that was clearly illegal.

The problem with the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book was not the evidence it amassed but that it made no effort to present a balanced assessment of Wałęsa. It offered no coverage of his invaluable contribution during the 1980–81 crisis and his courageous defiance of the SB when officials from the agency vigorously pressured Wałęsa in 1982 to turn against Solidarity. Nor did Cenckiewicz and Gontarczyk acknowledge Wałęsa's crucial role in the start and conduct of the Round Table Talks or his equally crucial role in forcing Jaruzelski to back down and accept a Solidarity-led government in the summer of 1989. The one-sided nature of the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book gave the impression that it was intended more as a political indictment than a solid work of scholarship. That said, the controversy clearly tarnished Wałęsa, who continued to deny even the most persuasive evidence against him rather than trying to respond to it as fully as possible.

By the time the IPN unexpectedly announced in February 2016 that Kiszczak had illegally kept a large quantity of classified files at his home, Wałęsa had won another court ruling against his accusers. Nonetheless,

⁴¹ Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk, *SB a Lech Wałęsa: Przyczynek do Biografii* (Gdańsk: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej—Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2008).

doubts about his integrity had steadily mounted in the wake of the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book. Thus, the IPN's disclosure of more than 350 pages of formerly secret documents confirming that Wałęsa was a paid SB informant in the 1970s under the cover name Bolek caused less of a shock than it might have in earlier years, at least in Poland (the shock perhaps was greater abroad, where few people had followed the earlier discussions).⁴² Full scanned images of the documents in Wałęsa's personnel and working SB files were made publicly available soon after the IPN obtained them. The disclosures were seized on by rival political factions in Poland, who used Wałęsa as a kind of symbol in their battles. Jarosław Kaczyński and other PiS officials amplified their earlier allegations that Wałęsa and Kiszczak colluded in 1989 in fashioning a postcommunist political order that worked to the benefit of senior communists.⁴³ By contrast, Donald Tusk, a critic of PiS who served as Polish prime minister from 2007 to 2014 after cofounding the centrist Civic Platform Party, dismissed the newly discovered documents as "just a rehash" of old allegations that "added nothing new."⁴⁴ Cenckiewicz, for his part, not only denounced Wałęsa but also accused the IPN of mishandling the Kiszczak documents—an accusation that seemed to be motivated more by politics than by evidence.

Had the debate not been so politicized both before and after the disclosure of the Kiszczak files, Wałęsa perhaps might have done a better job of responding and explaining his side of the story, but

⁴² See the IPN's periodic updates on the materials: "Informacja dotycząca udostępniania dokumentów z pakietu trzeciego i czwartego z materiałów zabezpieczonych w domu wdowy po Czesławie Kiszczaku," March 7, 2016; Agnieszka Sopińska-Jaremczak, Rzecznik prasowy IPN, "Komunikat o przekazaniu przez prokuratora IPN dokumentów pochodzących z trzeciego i czwartego pakietu materiałów zabezpieczonych w domu wdowy po Czesławie Kiszczaku," March 3, 2016; and Agnieszka Sopińska-Jaremczak, Rzecznik prasowy IPN, "Komunikat w sprawie ekspertyz dokumentów dotyczących tajnego współpracownika pseudonim 'Bolek,'" February 25, 2016.

⁴³ "Macierewicz o archiwum Kiszczaka: To koniec legendy Lecha Wałęsy," *Rzeczpospolita*, February 22, 2016, 7; "Antoni Macierewicz: Lech Wałęsa? Bez wątpliwości 'Bolek,'" *Rzeczpospolita*, February 18, 2016, 13; and Paweł Bravo, "Bolek': Wygodne półprawdy," *Tygodnik Powszechny* (Kraków), February 18, 2016, 17.

⁴⁴ "Tusk o teczkach z szafy Kiszczaka: Odgrzewana sprawa, przykra dla wizerunku," *Gazeta wyborcza*, February 18, 2016, 3.

one of the hazards of the politicization of historical memory is that it induces participants on all sides to take extreme positions and shifts the discussion away from its proper focus.

If Wałęsa had long ago acknowledged a link with the SB in the early 1970s and had explained that he was under great pressure at the time and did his best to keep his cooperation to a minimum, the controversy undoubtedly would have subsided relatively quickly and would have caused no significant damage to his reputation. But by denying all the evidence against him, he inadvertently fueled the impression that he was covering up something far worse. His failure to come to terms with his own past laid the groundwork for the partisan attacks against him.

Russia

No sooner had Stalin died than Russians began seeking to overcome his baleful legacy, a process that has continued in fits and starts for six decades by now, long after the demise of the Soviet Union. These efforts gained their first major impetus via the de-Stalinization campaign launched in 1956 by Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech as well as his further push on de-Stalinization in October 1961. Khrushchev's condemnation of Stalin was at best highly selective (focusing mainly on communist victims of Stalin's terror) but was enormously important in dissipating the godlike aura that had surrounded Stalin even after death. However, the process of de-Stalinization ground to a halt and was even partly reversed after Khrushchev's ouster in October 1964.

Not until the late 1980s, with the glasnost-era revelations under Mikhail Gorbachev, did a further drive to face up to the horrors of Stalinism begin in Soviet Russia. After decades of whitewashing, those revelations sparked wide public interest and excitement. Soviet historians, journalists, and public commentators were allowed, for the first time, to discuss sensitive topics in Soviet history, including the Stalinist terror, the Thaw and de-Stalinization campaign under Khrushchev, and the stifling conformity of the Brezhnev era. By the spring of 1988, even foreign policy issues were coming under much

harsher scrutiny—a trend signaled initially in May 1988 by the publication of a lengthy article by Vyacheslav Dashichev in *Literaturnaia gazeta*.⁴⁵ Over the next few years the Soviet government acknowledged serious “mistakes” and misdeeds in its policies toward other countries, particularly communist countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. These admissions went well beyond what Khrushchev had done.

Nonetheless, the historical reassessments under Gorbachev had their limits, and nearly all of the relevant archival sources remained off-limits. The situation changed fundamentally after the Soviet Union broke apart and Yeltsin emerged as president of the independent Russian Federation. One of the hallmarks of Yeltsin’s presidency in Russia was his willingness to facilitate a more accurate and thorough understanding of the Soviet past. Although several of the most important Soviet-era archives remained off-limits to researchers, Yeltsin opened numerous archives, if only imperfectly.⁴⁶ He also released selected materials from the inaccessible archives, especially the Presidential Archive, which houses most of the records of the Soviet Communist Party’s Politburo as well as many other highly classified collections. These unprecedented moves not only shed light on many of the internal abuses and atrocities of the Soviet era, but also went much further than Gorbachev in promoting reassessments of Soviet foreign policy, including well-known episodes that were still largely taboo during the Gorbachev era.

In particular, Yeltsin declassified archival collections that Gorbachev had refused to open. Crucial documents pertaining to the Katyn massacres of 1940, the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Soviet Union and the crisis in Poland

⁴⁵ Vyacheslav Dashichev, “Vostok-zapad: poisk novykh otnoshenii: O prioritetakh vneshnei politiki Sovetskogo gosudarstva,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 18, 1988), 14. In December 1988, Dashichev’s article was voted one of the best to have appeared in *Literaturnaia gazeta* that year.

⁴⁶ Mark Kramer, “Archival Research in Moscow: Progress and Pitfalls,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 3 (Fall 1993), 1, 18–39; and Mark Kramer, “Archival Policies and Historical Memory in the Post-Soviet Era,” *Demokratizatsiya* 20, no. 3 (Summer 2012), 12–25.

in 1980–81, the shooting down of a South Korean airliner in 1983, and other topics in Soviet foreign policy were released in the 1990s, often during visits by Yeltsin to the relevant countries. The declassification of crucial Soviet-era documents became, in some sense, an instrument of Yeltsin's foreign policy, as he sought to develop friendly relations with countries like South Korea and Poland that until recently had been either dominated by or hostile to the USSR.

Yeltsin also made considerable efforts to come to terms with the internal consequences of Stalinism, making vast quantities of documents available about the Gulag, the Great Famine of the early 1930s, the purges and the Great Terror, and the mass deportations of ethnic minorities. However, in contrast to the situation in the late 1980s when Soviet citizens were eagerly following the latest revelations about their country's past, the Russian public had little desire to learn about unsavory aspects of the communist period after the Soviet Union was dissolved in late 1991. Even as Yeltsin released more documents in the early 1990s attesting to Stalin's depraved callousness and criminality, the Russian public barely seemed to notice. The late Alexander Yakovlev, who played a central role in promoting reform during the Gorbachev era and then continued to serve as head of an official rehabilitation commission until his death in October 2005, was instrumental in the release of millions of pages of documents concerning the mass repressions of the Stalin era. In a June 2001 interview, Yakovlev said that "reading all these documents about horrible crimes and atrocities and bloodshed and suffering frightens me. It frightens me that people in this country could have behaved that way. But what frightens me more is the fact that the large majority of people in [Russia] are completely indifferent to this information."⁴⁷

Part of the problem in Russia in coming to terms with Stalin's legacy is the continued presence of officials who served loyally in the Soviet Communist Party, the Soviet government, and the Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB). These officials have been averse to harsh reassessments of the past and have hindered the release of sensitive

⁴⁷ Interview by the author with Yakovlev, at International Democracy Foundation, Moscow, June 11, 2001.

documents that would show the Soviet regime's activities in a sinister light. Putin, for example, has repeatedly said that he profoundly regrets the demise of the Soviet Union, describing it as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century"—a "catastrophe" that in his view apparently was worse than the rampant bloodshed of the two World Wars and the slaughter of untold millions under Stalin, Hitler, Mao, and the Khmer Rouge.⁴⁸ Although Putin has acknowledged that "excesses" occurred under Stalin and has taken part in ceremonies commemorating Stalinist repressions (especially those against the Russian Orthodox Church), he has also frequently hailed the "monumental accomplishments" of the Soviet regime, including the accomplishments of Stalin. Putin also often speaks with great pride and affection about the Soviet KGB, the notorious state security and foreign intelligence agency for which he worked for sixteen years in the 1970s and 1980s, carrying on the efforts of officers and foreign agents who served Stalin's regime. The main successor agencies to the KGB in post-Soviet Russia, the Federal Security Service (FSB) and Foreign Intelligence Service, extol the KGB's legacy in glossy publications and on their websites.⁴⁹

The proclivity of Russian leaders to hark back to the symbols and institutions of the Soviet regime and the Stalin era has made it extremely difficult to overcome that terrible legacy. Yeltsin had an opportunity early on to promote a full-scale historical accounting, but he largely squandered it.⁵⁰ Not only did he keep several of the most important Soviet-era archives tightly sealed, he also failed to ensure the systematic removal of statues of Vladimir Lenin and of other monuments glorifying the Soviet regime, and he was unwilling to disband (or even scale back) the sprawling state security organs, which were just as symbolic of Stalinist terror as the SS and Gestapo were of Nazi

⁴⁸ "Poslanie Prezidenta Rossii Vladimira Putina Federal'nomu sobraniyu RF: 2005 god," *Rossiiskaia gazeta* (Moscow), April 26, 2005, 1, 2–4.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Federal'naia sluzhba bezopasnosti RF, *Lubyanka 2: Iz istorii otechestvennoi kontrrazvedki* (Moscow: Mosgorarkhiv, 1999).

⁵⁰ Nikolai Koposov, "The Armored Train of Memory': The Politics of History in Post-Soviet Russia," *Perspectives on History* 49, no. 1 (January 2011), 23–31; and Dina Khapaeva, "Historical Memory in Post-Soviet Gothic Society," *Social Research* 76, no. 1 (Spring 2009), 359–94.

atrocities. Although the KGB was reorganized in late 1991, the agency's repressive apparatus and personnel were preserved essentially intact and simply renamed a few times.

The strength of the state security organs in post-Soviet Russia was vividly symbolized by the ascendance of Putin, who served as head of the FSB in the late 1990s and then became acting president of Russia at the end of 1999 before being elected president three months later. The pernicious impact of Putin on historical memory in Russia was evident in a mass survey conducted by the respected Levada Center in 2005 involving a random, nationally representative sample of 1,513.⁵¹ A plurality of respondents in the survey chose Stalin as the "greatest leader" in Russia's history. Follow-on surveys every year over the next decade revealed similar results as well as widespread public misperceptions of the Stalin era.⁵² The distortions became particularly acute after Putin forcibly annexed Crimea in March 2014. Most of the respondents in these surveys were either favorable or neutral in their assessments of Stalin, and roughly 25 percent said they would "definitely" vote for Stalin if he were to come back to life and run for president.

Putin also has brought back some of the trappings and symbols used by Stalin, and he has appointed a large number of former KGB officials to senior posts in his government. As early as May 2000, barely a month after being elected president, Putin authorized the Russian Central Bank to issue 500 special silver coins bearing Stalin's portrait, ostensibly to commemorate the Soviet Union's role in World War II. A few days later, at a ceremony marking the fifty-fifth anniversary of the end of the war, Putin unveiled a plaque honoring "Generalissimo Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin" for his "heroic leadership." Putin also

⁵¹ Sarah E. Mendelson and Theodore P. Gerber, "Failing the Stalin Test: Russians and Their Dictator," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 1 (January–February 2006): 2–8.

⁵² Analiticheskii Tsentrii Yuriia Levady: "Opros: Rol' Stalina v istorii Rossii" (January 2016); "Opros: Stalin i ego rol' v istorii strany" (March–April 2015); "Opros: Rol' lichnostei v istorii Rossii" (January 2015); "Opros: Otnoshenie k Stalinu v Rossii i stranakh Zakavkaz'ia" (March 2013); "Opros: Otnoshenie k lichnosti i epokhe Iosifa Stalina" (October 2014); "Opros: Rossiiane o Staline" (March 2010). See also Boris Dubin, *Rossiiia nulevykh: Politicheskaiia kul'tura, istoricheskaiia pamiat', povsednevnaia zhizn'* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011), III et passim.

approved the setting up of a bust of Stalin at the Poklonnaya Gora war memorial.⁵³ Several months later, in December 2000, Putin pushed for legislation to bring back the old Soviet national anthem, which had been commissioned by Stalin in 1943 and replaced by Yeltsin in late 1991. The anthem was formally restored as of January 2001 (albeit with different words), an event that Putin marked with great solemnity.⁵⁴

When Putin was asked in an interview how he could justify the revival of such a blatant symbol of Stalinist repression, he conceded that “many people” associate the anthem with “the horrors of Stalin’s prison camps.” But Putin stressed that any such association was unjustified and that the anthem should instead be linked with the “many achievements of the Soviet period in which people can take pride.”⁵⁵ Putin returned to this theme numerous times in later years, leaving little doubt that Stalin’s transgressions were more than outweighed by his role in having converted the Soviet Union into a “great power” that “commanded the attention of the entire world.”⁵⁶

The restoration (or uninterrupted use) of conspicuous symbols of the Stalinist regime inevitably mitigates and blurs over Stalin’s crimes. The continued celebration of Soviet holidays in the Russian Federation, particularly the “Day of the Security Organs” on December 20 (the day the notorious Bolshevik secret police, the Cheka, were founded in 1917), conveys a striking degree of callousness toward the millions of Russians and others who fell victim to the Soviet state security

⁵³ “Iz zhizhni pamiatnikov: Stalina vezli na reabilitatsiiu v kovshe traktora,” *Komsomolskaia pravda* (Moscow), June 19, 2001, 8.

⁵⁴ Tat’iana Uklyuchina, “Spory po povodu slov gimna ne prekrashchaiutsia,” *Vremia novostei* (Moscow), February 1, 2001, 1; “Oshibaetsia li ‘Putin s narodom’? Gimn i muki sovesti russkoi intelligentsii,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (Moscow), December 6, 2000, 1; and Aleksandr Gamov, “Glavnaia pesnia o starom: Pochemu novyi Gimn Rossii tak trudno vkhodit v nashu zhizn’,” *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, January 26, 2001, 4.

⁵⁵ “Vladimir Putin: Ne zhech’ mostov, ne raskalyvat’ obshchestvo,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, December 6, 2000, 1.

⁵⁶ Maria Lipman, Lev Gudkov, and Lasha Bakradze, *The Stalin Puzzle: Deciphering Post-Soviet Public Opinion* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013); Lev Gudkov, “Zachem Kreml’ proslavliaet Stalina,” *Novoe vremia* (Moscow), April 2, 2015, 7; and Igor Kharichev, “Putin i Stalin,” *Ezhednevnyi zhurnal* (Moscow), May 2, 2013.

apparatus. Indeed, Putin in 2007 chose to award the posthumous plaque and medal to George Koval on the eve of Military Intelligence Day (November 5), another specialized holiday created by the Stalin-era Soviet government to glorify the intelligence and repressive organs.⁵⁷

The treatment of Stalin changed only slightly during the four years of Dmitry Medvedev's presidency, from May 2008 through May 2012. Medvedev made some forthright statements denouncing Stalin and holding out hopes of a fuller reckoning with Soviet atrocities, but he did not follow up with any concrete, sustained action. Moreover, in May 2009, Medvedev (with Putin's strong support) established a presidential commission to "counter attempts at falsifying history against Russia's interests."⁵⁸ The Orwellian name of the commission had the unintended effect of implying that the Russian government would welcome historical falsifications as long as they were "beneficial to Russia's interests." The commission met numerous times in 2009, 2010, and 2011, and for a while the formation of the body seemed to portend a stifling clampdown on historical debate, especially regarding the two issues of greatest importance to Putin: the mass famine in Ukraine in 1932–33 and the Soviet role in World War II.

As it turned out, the commission's work had little concrete impact—confined largely to prolix discussions with little connection to actual history—but the mere existence of the commission was a symbolic reminder of Putin's interest in fostering a particular historical narrative that would suit his political agenda. The experience with it, and the possibility of resurrecting it later, thus had the potential to stifle public discussion of themes and events that could be depicted as "detrimental to Russia's interests." The disbandment of the commission in early 2012

⁵⁷ On the carry-over of Soviet holidays into post-Soviet Russia, see Aleksei Makarkin, "Protivorechiye prazdniki v novoi Rossii," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* (Moscow), no. 3 (2015): 13–27. On a closely related issue, see Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, "Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93, no. 3 (2002): 524–47.

⁵⁸ "Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii o Komissii pri Prezidente Rossiiskoi Federatsii po protivodeistviu popytkam fal'sifikatsii istorii v ushcherb interesam Rossii," Ukaz Prezidenta RF No. 549, May 15 2009, in *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, May 20, 2009, 2.

meant that it could no longer have a chilling effect on public debate, but the three years of its operation underscored the continued problems in Russia in facing up to the Soviet past.⁵⁹

Even during the far-reaching (albeit temporary) easing of tensions between Russia and Poland in the spring of 2010 after the tragic air crash in Smolensk on April 10, 2010, the Russian government refrained from pursuing a broader historical reckoning. The antifalsification commission continued to meet, and eventually some of the earlier disingenuous assertions about the Katyn massacres (suggesting that they were perpetrated by German rather than Soviet forces) returned to Russia's official discourse.⁶⁰ The publication of a remarkable article by Sergei Karaganov in the state-sponsored *Rossiiskaia gazeta* in July 2010, forcefully denouncing not only Stalinism but also Stalin's admirers, raised hopes anew that the Russian government would finally seek to face up to the past.⁶¹ But those hopes proved in vain. The theme put forth by Karaganov, a long-time establishment insider, influenced some of the deliberations of the Valdai Club (which meets each year for a few days of discussions organized by the Russian government ostensibly as a show of openness but also as a propaganda vehicle) in September 2010, but it had little resonance beyond that. Medvedev proved unwilling to take up the mantle to push for a systematic, high profile reckoning with the Soviet past and the construction of memorials to

⁵⁹ "Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 14.02.2012 Nr. 183 'Ob utverzhdeenii sostava Komissii pri Prezidente Rossiiskoi Federatsii po formirovaniyu i podgotovke rezerva upravlencheskikh kadrov, izmenenii i priznanii utrativshimi silu utrativshimi silu nekotorykh aktov Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii,'" Ukaz Prezidenta RF No. 183, 14 February 2012, in *Sobranie zakonodatelstva Rossiiskoi Federatsii: 2012 g.* (Moscow), Vol. 8, Part III, 988.

⁶⁰ Among the many vulgar distortions of the history of the Katyn massacres are "Lozh' o Katyni vskryvaetsya," *Segodnya* (Moscow), 23 June 2012, 7; Colonel Sergei Kovalev, "Vymysli i fal'sifikatsii v otsenkakh roli SSSR nakanune i s nachalom Vtoroi mirovoi voiny," mil.ru (Russian Ministry of Defense website), 4 June 2009; Arsen Martirosyan, "Kto rasstrelyal plennykh polskikh ofitserov v Katyni," *Pravda* (Moscow), 14 April 2010, 5; "Vystupleniya V. I. Ilyukhina na Plenarnom zasedanii Gosdumy pri obsuzhdenii Zayavleniya 'Pamyati zhertv Katynskoi tragedii,'" *Sovetskaya Rossiya* (Moscow), 26 November 2010, 2; and several books by Yurii Mukhin, an ardent Stalinist who has made it his mission to "demonstrate" that German rather than Soviet forces killed the Polish prisoners.

⁶¹ Sergei Karaganov, "Russkaya Katyn," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, July 22, 2010, 3.

Stalin's victims. Indeed, no sooner had the Valdai Club's discussions ended in September 2010 than the antifalsification commission met and returned to all of its standard bromides, a trend that continued until the commission was dismantled shortly before Medvedev stepped down in 2012.⁶²

Any remaining effort in Russia to come to terms with the Soviet past all but ended after Putin returned as president in May 2012 and especially after he oversaw the forcible seizure of Crimea from Ukraine in early 2014 and then fueled an insurgency in Ukraine's Donbas region. Amid a surge of tensions with the West over Russia's actions in Ukraine, Putin revived sinister rhetoric from the Stalin era, denouncing his liberal Russian critics as "national traitors," a Western "fifth column," and "foreign agents."⁶³ Pro-Kremlin commentators took their cue from Putin, arguing that measures adopted by Stalin in the 1930s to "liquidate traitors" and "uproot the fifth column" in the USSR would be appropriate nowadays to "prevent traitors from undermining morale" and "subvert the Russian state" on behalf of "their sponsors in the West."⁶⁴ Just as Stalin had launched a murderous campaign against Jews in the late 1940s and early 1950s on the grounds of their supposed questionable loyalty to the USSR, so the supporters of Putin who began assailing "traitors" and "fifth columnists" in Russia were often inclined to target Lev Schlossberg, Grigorii Yavlinskii, and other Jews, often in unmistakably anti-Semitic terms.⁶⁵

⁶² "Sostoialos' sovместnoe zasedanie Komissii po protivodeistviu popytkam fal'sifikatsii istorii v ushcherb interesam Rossii i Mezhdodomstvennoi komissii po zashchite gosudarstvennoi tainy," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 8 September 2010, 1.

⁶³ "Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 18 marta 2014 goda, Moskva, Kreml'," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 19 March 2014, 1–2.

⁶⁴ For a small sample, see Vladimir Bushin, *Pyataya kolonna* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2014); Evgenii Shestakov, "Mir ustanovitsya vse menea prozapadnym: Nyneshniaia amerikanskaia politika natselena na smeny rezhima v Rossii," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, April 24, 2014, 3; and Andrei Andreev, "Piataia kolonna predatelei protiv suvereniteta Rossii," Novoruss.info, March 1, 2015. For a prescient early forecast of the likely impact of Putin's rhetoric, see Aleksandra Samarina and Ivan Rodin, "Fultonskaia rech" Putina: Rossiui ot zapada snova mozhnet otdelit' zhelezhnyi zanaves," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, March 19, 2014, 3. For a survey after a year-and-a-half, see Valerii Vyzhutovich, "Nuzhna li Rossii gosudarstvennaya ideologiya?" *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, August 15, 2015, 5.

⁶⁵ On this phenomenon, see Aleksei Gorbachev, "'Natsional-predateli' v kompetentsii uchastkovykh," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, September 1, 2014, 2.

The revival of Stalin-era rhetoric was accompanied by a further emphasis on Stalin's "great achievements." During the highly publicized ceremonies in 2015 commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the end of the war against Germany, Stalin's portrait was on display and numerous speakers praised him as a "great leader in time of war," evidently implying that Putin was playing the same role.⁶⁶ The parallels drawn between Stalin's role in World War II and Putin's role in Ukraine (and later Syria) were featured repeatedly in state-controlled television broadcasts.

Courageous organizations in Russia like Memorial and the International Democracy Foundation have continued to do extremely valuable work in documenting the mass repressions of the Stalin era, but a full reckoning with the Stalinist past must encompass the whole society and the whole polity. The change of generations, unfortunately, has not helped. Young Russians are almost as inclined as their elders to look favorably on Stalin, and surveys in the past several years have revealed that most Russians between the ages of eighteen to twenty-four now view the world in roughly the same way that Putin does—that is, they believe that Russia is being unfairly hounded and besieged by "enemies," especially the United States, and that Russia must assert itself as a "great power" to deter "Western encroachments" and "prevent the world from falling under the hegemony of the West."⁶⁷

In light of these unfavorable trends, the task of facing up to the many horrors of Stalin's rule will require integrity on the part of public officials in Russia—officials who take no "pride" in the Stalinist

⁶⁶ Sergei Medvedev, "Prazdnik bez slez na glazakh: Chto sluchilos' s Dnem Pobedy," *Forbes.ru*, May 8, 2015; "Russia's Victory Day Celebration: Great Patriotic War, Again," *Economist*, May 2–8, 2015, 54–55; Neil MacFarquhar, "A Parade Hailing Russia's World War II Dead and Marching Further from the West," *New York Times*, May 8, 2015, A4; Ingo Mannteufel, "Opinion: Instrumentalizing History—Moscow and May 9," *Deutsche Welle*, May 9, 2015; "V Moskve mozhet poiavit'sia pamiatnik Stalinu: 'Otказyvat'sia ot Stalina—znachit otkazyvat'sia ot samikh sebia,'" *Nakanune.ru*, February 26, 2015. See also Henry Meyer, "Russia Reenacts WWII March after Putin Defends Nazi Pact," *Bloomberg News wire*, November 7, 2014.

⁶⁷ Analiticheskii Tsentri Yuriia Levady, "Opros: Bor'ba s 'piatoi kolonnoi' i oshchushchenie svobody v obshchestve" (December 2015); "Nastroenie molodykh rossiian o nastupaiushchem godu: Press-vypusk" (December 2011), pts. 1–4; and "Obshchestvennoe mnenie—2011: Ezhegodnik" (2012), 26–28.

regime's "monumental achievements" and are instead committed to overcoming Stalin's invidious legacy once and for all. If Putin remains in the presidency until 2024, he may well stymie any further attempt to come to terms with the evil of Stalin's regime. Although a museum commemorating the horrors of the Gulag was opened in Russia in 2015, this was a lonely exception in the trend toward obfuscation of the Soviet past. Putin has given every reason to believe that he is unwilling to "rehash the past" (the dismissive term he regularly uses). In the absence of a fuller historical reckoning, Stalin's legacy will remain a blight on Russia's future.

The lack of a thorough reckoning with the past has had deleterious effects on the Russian population. Russians who proudly display portraits of Stalin on the streets of Moscow or who lay flowers before symbols of the Stalinist regime are never chided for condoning a regime and a dictator who engaged in mass murder. On the contrary, the admirers of Stalin can now purchase silver coins with his image from the Russian government itself. This may help explain why a large number of Russians regard Stalin as the "greatest leader" in their country's history. It is inconceivable that a majority or plurality of Germans nowadays would think of Hitler in similar terms. It is also inconceivable that Germans today would tolerate any suggestion of reviving the Hitler-Jugend (Hitler Youth). In Russia, by contrast, no outcry at all has emerged over the growing power and size of youth indoctrination organizations that were originally set up by Putin to forestall an orange-style revolution in Russia. These groups not only organize young people in support of Putin but also viciously belittle and threaten human rights and pro-democracy activists in Russia. They are akin to the Komsomol, the communist youth organization that indoctrinated millions of Soviet young people and prepared them for lifetime devotion to Stalin's regime.

As long as the symbols and institutions of Stalinist repression are still extant and even flourishing in Russia—whether in modified form or unchanged—the prospects for democracy will be dim. Putin's use of these symbols and institutions on behalf of his political agenda has at least partly undone the progress that was achieved under Yeltsin, imperfect though it was. The longevity of Putin's rule means that any

effort now to resume the process of historical reckoning will be even more difficult. Many Russians, especially the younger generation, will wonder why they need to go back and reassess issues they assumed had already been settled long ago. Perhaps only after a suitable passage of time will it be viable to reexamine thorny questions of historical memory in Russia.

Conclusions

The former communist countries that have done the most to encourage a thorough reckoning with the crimes of the communist period have enjoyed greater stability than the countries that have avoided any reappraisal of the past or that have embarked on the process selectively or halfheartedly. Deep and lasting democratization in the former East-bloc states has made the most headway when the iniquities of the communist period have been exposed to public light and when leaders of these countries have unequivocally denounced the individuals who were complicit in overseeing systematic cruelty and terror. Even in countries that once seemed staunch democratic members of the European Union, such as Poland and Hungary, unresolved issues about the past have remained sore points and have contributed to recent setbacks for democratic norms. In these countries, as in Russia, a full reckoning with historical controversies will be essential to cement the foundations of democratic institutions and forestall the rise of lurid conspiracy theories that play into the hands of political leaders who are intent on thwarting democratization.

Coming to terms with past traumas is bound to be difficult for any society, especially when the trauma was inflicted from within. In all of the former Soviet-bloc countries, a full historical reckoning will discomfit people, just as it did in Germany after World War II. Millions of ordinary Soviet citizens were, to one degree or another, complicit in the Stalinist repressions by serving as informers (*stukachi* in Russian, roughly meaning “stool-pigeons”) or supporting the regime in other ways. In the post-Stalin era, the KGB continued to recruit millions of informants, whose identities would be disclosed if Soviet records were

ever fully opened. Equally important, many powerful individuals who served in various capacities for the Soviet regime have a stake in keeping historical records closed and in forestalling a thorough historical reckoning.

Much the same is true about the East European communist countries. Even though the systems there were imposed and propped up by the Soviet Union, local elites and millions of ordinary people played crucial roles in the functioning and maintenance of the regimes. Organizations like the IPN in Poland, the office of the Federal Commissioner (BStU) in Germany who supervises the former East German State Security archives, and the special COMDOS commission in Bulgaria that oversees and makes public the former Bulgarian State Security (DS) and military intelligence records have done invaluable work in documenting the repressions of the communist period in a professional, nonpartisan manner, but it is hardly surprising that the IPN (which is newer than the BStU) has come under political pressure during the two governments headed by Kaczyński's Law and Justice Party (2005–7 and 2015–present).

It is even less surprising that in both Romania and the Czech Republic IPN-like institutes have often been politicized. Over time, one hopes, those institutes will come closer to the standards of the BStU, IPN, and COMDOS in carrying out highly professional research and publishing huge collections of documents both as books and in digitized form on the Internet. (The Czech institute, known as the Ústav pro Studium Totalitních Režimů [ÚSTR], has already been putting vast quantities of materials online and has been moving toward a more nonpartisan approach since 2014, but a great deal of additional work is needed, and the ÚSTR will have to shed the image it has of being a partisan organization favoring the Civic Democratic Party.) Such activities will greatly facilitate efforts to understand and come to terms with the communist past.

Because only two decades have passed since the end of European (and Mongolian) communism, it is probably too early to expect that a full reckoning with the crimes and abuses of the communist period would be possible. Even in Germany, a country that has achieved an immense amount in grappling with its Nazi past and has done a considerable amount to come to terms with the atrocities and repression of the communist period in the East, the image of East German communism

is still often presented in an unduly benign light not only in popular culture (in films like *Goodbye, Lenin!* and *Das Leben der Anderen*) but also in some scholarly and official publications. In the three Baltic countries, which have opened everything in their Soviet-era archives, including their KGB archives, the problem of coming to terms with history pertains not to the Soviet era (which is rightly reviled) but to the Nazi period, which is all too often whitewashed. Until the Baltic countries honestly face up to the horrors of *both* periods, their commendable efforts to hold people accountable for Soviet-era repressions will be perceived as selective justice.

In the other East European countries and in the former Soviet Union, historical memory of the communist period is likely to remain controversial for many years to come. Nostalgia for the communist era, based on a grossly selective “memory” of what communism was truly like, has been common in some quarters for a long while and is likely to remain so. In Russia, Putin has repeatedly expressed nostalgia for the Soviet era himself, and public opinion polling indicates that his sentiments are widely shared. Until Russian leaders are on the scene who are committed to facing up to the horrors of the Soviet period, any attempts at historical reckoning in Russia by groups like Memorial are bound to reach only a very limited segment of the population. Hence, in Russia a true coming-to-terms with the Stalinist period and with Soviet history more generally may have to wait another twenty years or longer. Elsewhere in the former Soviet bloc, the outlook is brighter, but the process of historical reckoning is bound to be prolonged.

The experiences of well-established democracies like Germany, Japan, and the United States confirm that coming to grips with egregious abuses and horrors of the past are is a difficult and often uncomfortable process. But the experiences of those countries also shows that the further the process goes, the better from the standpoint of democratic stability. Although some degree of “public forgetting” and “selective memory” is inevitable, the more fully that societies come to terms with the past, the less likely it is that past events will one day come back to haunt them.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ On the role of “forgetting” in public memory, see Bradford Vivian, *Public Forgetting: The Rhetoric and Politics of Beginning Again* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

List of Contributors

PETER BAEHR is Professor of Social Theory at Lingnan University, Hong Kong. He is the author of *Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism, and the Social Sciences* (Stanford UP, 2010), and is currently writing a book on the history of the concept of “unmasking.”

ANTONELLA D’AMELIA is a scholar of Russian culture and has investigated the relationship between literature and other arts, looking into the literary text and its interconnections with theatre, painting, design and architecture. She has studied twentieth-century Russian emigration to Berlin, Rome and Paris and has published a criticism of Aleksej Michajlovic Remizov’s works. She has also focused on the work of Nikolaj Gogol’ and Fedor Dostoevskij and has examined Russian intellectual life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries using historical and literary archival records.

From 1980 to 2006 she was co-editor of the Journal “Europa Orientalis” dedicated to studies and research on Eastern European countries and cultures. Since 2000 she has also been the editor of the series “Europa Orientalis” and published several volumes containing unpublished materials and studies about Russian emigration. Full Professor of Russian Language and Literature at the University of Salerno since 1989, she was Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature from 1998 to 2006. She is currently Professor Emeritus at the University of Salerno.

EMILIO GENTILE is Professor Emeritus, University of Rome La Sapienza. He was Visiting Professor in Australia, the United States and France, and in 2003 was awarded the Hans Sigrist Prize by the University of Bern for his studies on the sacralization of politics. His books, translated into many languages, include in English: *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*; *The Struggle for Modernity. Nationalism, Futurism and Fascism*; *The Origins of Fascist Ideology*; *Politics as Religion*; *God’s Democracy*; *American Religion after September 11*; *La Grande Italia. The Myth*

of the Nation in the Twentieth Century; “Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation”, in *Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion* (ed. R. Griffin); “Hannah Arendt’s Silence”, in *Totalitarianism and Liberty. Hannah Arendt in the 21st Century* (eds. G. Besier, K. Stokłosa and A. Wisely).

MARIA TERESA GIUSTI got a PhD in Social Political History at University of Bologna. She is Associate Professor of Contemporary History at the Department of Humanities, Arts and Social Studies of University “G. d’Annunzio” of Chieti-Pescara, Italy, where she teaches Contemporary History and Social History. She has published several articles, in Italy and abroad, on the themes of Italian Prisoners of War during WWII, antifascist propaganda organized among POWs in the Soviet Union, the Italian occupation and the behaviour of Italian Troops in Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece from 1940 to 1943 and the War of Resistance in the Balkans until 1945. Her first volume, *I prigionieri italiani in Russia* (Il Mulino, 2003, 2009), has been also published in Russia (Aleteja, 2010) and in a new extended version in 2014. With Elena Aga-Rossi she has published *Una guerra a parte. I militari italiani nei Balcani. 1940-1945* (Il Mulino, 2011). Her books have won several national prizes.

ANDREA GRAZIOSI currently serves as President of the Italian Agency for the evaluation of Universities and research and is a professor (on leave) at the Università di Napoli Federico II, as well as an associate of the Centre d’études des mondes russe, caucasien et centre-européen (Paris) and a fellow of Harvard’s Ukrainian Research Institute and Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies. His research interests include Ukrainian, Russian and Soviet history; European history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and the political history of languages. His publications include *Lettere da Kharkov* (Torino, 1991); *The Great Soviet Peasant War* (Cambridge, MA, 1996); *A New Peculiar State* (Westport, CT, 2000), *Histoire de l’URSS* (Paris, 2010). He is the coeditor of the series *Dokumenty sovetskoi istorii* (Moscow: Rosspen 1993 to the present).

LEV GUDKOV has been the Director of the Levada Analytical Center since 2006. He is also Editor-in-Chief of the magazine “Russian Public Opinion Herald” and Professor at the Higher School of Economics. He studied journalism, sociology and philology at the Moscow State University and USSR Academy of Sciences, and he is Doctor of Philosophy (1995). Since 1970 had worked at various institutions of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

DAVID HOLLOWAY is the Raymond A. Spruance Professor in International History, Professor of History and of Political Science, and Senior Fellow at the Freeman-Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University. He is the author of *The Soviet Union and the Arms Race* (Yale University Press, 1983) and *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic energy, 1939-1956* (Yale University Press, 1994) among other works. He is currently working on the history of nuclear weapons.

OLEG V. KHLEVNIUK is a leading research fellow at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (Russian Federation) International Center for the History and Sociology of World War II and its Consequences. He is the author of *The History of the GULAG. From Collectivization to the Great Terror* (2004); with Yoram Gorlizki *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945-1953* (2004); *Master of the House. Stalin and His Inner Circle* (2008) and *Stalin. New Biography of a Dictator* (2015).

MARK KRAMER is Director of Cold War Studies at Harvard University and a Senior Fellow of Harvard’s Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies. Originally trained in mathematics, he went on to study international relations as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University and was also an Academy Scholar in Harvard’s Academy of International and Area Studies. He has published many books and articles on a wide variety of topics, and he is editor and main author of the forthcoming three-volume survey *The Fate of Communist Regimes, 1989-1991*, to be published by Rowman & Littlefield and Oxford University Press. He has taught international relations and comparative politics at Harvard and as a visiting professor at Yale University, Brown University, Aarhus

University in Denmark, the University of International Business and Economics in China, and American University in Bulgaria.

GAIL W. LAPIDUS is a Senior Fellow Emerita at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University, specializing in issues of ethno-political conflict and regional security in Central Europe and the former Soviet region. Before coming to Stanford in 1996 she served as Professor of Political Science at the University of California at Berkeley from 1976 to 1994, where she directed the Center for Slavic and East European Studies as well as the Berkeley-Stanford Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies. She is the author of numerous books and articles on Soviet and post-Soviet politics, society and foreign policy. Her courses at Berkeley and at Stanford have focused on issues of political and economic development in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, on ethno-political conflicts and conflict resolution in the Caucasus region, with a particular focus on the wars in Chechnya, and on state and nation-building in Central Asia.

GIOVANNI ORSINA is professor of history at Luiss-Guido Carli University, Rome, where he is also deputy director of the School of Government. Orsina holds a PhD in history from the University of Roma Tre. He has taught at the Universities of Bologna (1996–97), l'Aquila (1998–2001) and Roma Sapienza (2001–2005). He has been a British Council Italian visiting fellow at St Antony's College, Oxford (1997–98), and visiting professor at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Cachan (2006 and 2014) and at Sciences-Po Paris (2003, 2009, 2012). Among his publications: *Senza Chiesa né classe. Il partito radicale nell'età giolittiana* (1998); *L'alternativa liberale. Malagodi e l'opposizione al centro sinistra* (2010); *Berlusconism and Italy. A Historical Interpretation* (2014; Italian edition 2013; French edition forthcoming); *European Parties and the European Integration Process, 1945–1992* (2015, edited with Lucia Bonfreschi and Antonio Varsori).

VLADIMIR O. PECHATNOV is Chair of the Department of European and American Studies at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). He specializes in US political history, the Cold War

and the history of US–Soviet/Russian relations. Distinguished Scholar of the Russian Federation, he has published numerous articles and several books including *Stalin, Roosevelt, Truman: The Soviet Union and the United States in the 1940s* (in Russian, 2006), “Soviet-American Relations through the Cold War” in: *Oxford Handbook of the Cold War* (2013), and *Stalin’s Correspondence with Roosevelt and Churchill during the Great Patriotic War. A Documentary Investigation* (vol. 1-2, in Russian, 2015).

TOMMASO PIFFER is the Bodossakis Research Fellow of Churchill College at the University of Cambridge and an affiliate of the Harvard University’s Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies.

VITTORIO STRADA is Professor Emeritus, University of Venezia. He holds a PhD in Philology from the University of Moscow and served as director of the Italian cultural institute of Moscow (1992–1996). He is author of numerous books on the history of Russian literature and culture. He also directed the history of Russian literature published in France by Fayard and the international journal “Rossija/Russia.”

VLADIMIR TISMANEANU is Professor of Politics at University of Maryland (College Park) and President of the Scientific Council of the Institute for the Investigation of Communism Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (Romania). Among his books are *Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel* (Free Press, 1992, paperback with a new epilogue, 1993); *Fantasies of Salvation: Nationalism, Democracy, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton UP, 1998; paperback 2009); *Stalinism for All Seasons: a Political History of Romanian Communism* (University of California Press, 2003) and *The Devil in History. Lessons of the 20th Century* (University of California Press, 2012).

VELJKO VUJAČIĆ is Provost of the European University at St Petersburg and Professor of Sociology at Oberlin College. Professor Vujačić’s fields of specialization include sociological theory, political sociology and comparative-historical sociology, with a special focus on theories of nationalism and the development of communism and nationalism in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. He has published articles on these

topics in *Theory and Society*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, *East European Politics and Societies*, *Comparative Politics*, *Research in Political Sociology*, *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, *The Encyclopedia of Revolutions*, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Comparative Sociology*, and various edited volumes. Professor Vujačić is the author of two books: *The Sociology of Nationalism: Essays in Theoretical and Applied Sociology with Case Studies of Russia and Serbia* (Belgrade: JP Službeni glasnik, 2013; in Serbian), and *Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia: Antecedents of the Dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

INESSA S. YAZHBOROVSKAIA, Doctor of Historical Sciences, is professor and chief researcher at the Center of Political Science and Political Sociology at the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. She graduated from the History Department at Moscow State University. She is author and coauthor of more than 300 scientific papers, including 10 monographs.

VLADISLAV ZUBOK is Professor of International History at the London School of Economics. Among his publications are *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War* (with Costantine Pleshakov, Harvard University Press, 1996); *Anti-Americanism in Russia: From Stalin to Putin* (with Eric Shiraev, Palgrave Press, 2000); *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Harvard University Press, 2009); *The Idea of Russia. The Life and the Works of Dmitry Likhachev* (I. B. Tauris, 2016).

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